The Art of Christ

DOM ANSCAR VONIER O.S.B.

THE ART OF CHRIST

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A KEY TO THE DOCTRINE OF THE EUCHARIST

THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME

The Art of Christ

RETREAT CONFERENCES

BY

DOM ANSCAR VONIER, O.S.B.

ABBOT OF BUCKFAST

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LONDON

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PUBLISHERS TO THE HOLY SEE

First printed in 1927

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Datum Sublaci ex Asceterio S. Specus,
Die 26 *Martii*, 1927.

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EDM. CAN. SURMONT,
Vicarius generalis.

WESTMONASTERII,
Die 23ª *Maji*, 1927.

Made and Printed in Great Britain

FOREWORD

THE Retreat Conferences which make up this little volume were given to Catholic ladies at the Convent of Our Lady of the Cenacle, at Grayshott, in the autumn of 1926.

The matter of the book of necessity reveals that inequality and unevenness which are incidental to a Retreat. Yet it has been thought that the subjects thus presented in an unconventional way might be of greater help to a certain class of souls than a more didactic treatment of spiritual matters. This is my only apology for issuing the papers in their present form; perhaps it is my only chance of writing simply, for simple souls.

ANSCAR VONIER, O.S.B.,
Abbot.

BUCKFAST ABBEY,
Feast of the Purification, 1927.

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THE ART OF CHRIST

CHAPTER I

THE WAY OF CHRIST

ONE day our blessed Lord was on the road with His disciples, as so often happened, and He was passing through Samaria, through the country of those strange people the Samaritans, who were unfriendly to the Jews, who were not, in a way, the object of Christ's mission, for it was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel that He had been sent. And as He approached their city the inhabitants closed their gates against Him "because his face was of one going to Jerusalem."[1] The disciples felt keenly that affront to their divine Master, and waxed very hot over the indignity, and amongst them, perhaps louder than the rest, the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, gave strong expression to their indignation, and came to their Master saying: "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" Here you have a wonderful scene, and certainly a most over-

[1] St. Luke ix 53.

powering act of faith. Just imagine these youths—they were mere youths, some of them —confidently expecting that at their word of command a flood of fire would come down and devour the whole city; they evidently had not the smallest doubt that it would be so. But our Lord's reply came with unaccustomed severity: " You know not of what spirit you are. The Son of man came not to destroy souls, but to save."

There is precisely this very thing in Christianity which our Lord here shows in such clear opposition to the turbulent anger of His followers, this spirit of Christianity, this most perfect thing, real but elusive. Certainly these holy men, the disciples of Christ, had great faith in Him; they had reached that state of mental perfection which did not admit of any more doubt as to His Divinity; they were loyal and devoted to Him, ready to do anything for Him. And yet our Lord emphatically says that they have not yet grasped the great genius of His religion; they have not as yet seen His art, so to speak; they have not perceived the spirit which makes all the difference between His religion and other religions, the spirit of Christianity which is truly the art of Christ.

Has it never struck you as you read the

Gospels that behind all the parables, behind all the prophecies, events, and vicissitudes, there is something which you can only term the " art " of Christ; something very subtle, almost undefinable, but always present ? Has it never occurred to you that He alone could have behaved as He did behave ? Nobody understood Him. His disciples could not; though they loved Him and believed in Him so loyally, they did not understand Him. There is a divine superiority in our Lord, and He must be alone, walking by Himself. What, then, is that mystery which He, as it were, holds back ? It is the real spirit, the final spirit, the power that will fuse into something very wonderful all the other sacred facts of the Gospel; it is the spirit of Christ, the spirit of Christianity. I call it the art of Christ because it is connected with the mighty problem of man's salvation, the real art which He alone possessed, which He alone knew, the art which He promised to reveal to His disciples, and speaking of which He says: " I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the spirit of truth, is come, he will teach you all truth." Now this spirit of Christ the apostles received on the day of Pentecost, and the same spirit remains for ever in the Catholic Church

and is not to be found outside the Catholic Church. It is a thing far too delicate, too elusive, not to be lost by those who break away from the Body of Christ.

So, during the days of this Retreat, while we are gathered here, we shall endeavour to study the spirit of Christ. It is a great study, it will require full attention, and perhaps some of you are no better than the sons of Zebedee, perhaps you do not know of what spirit you are, what it really means, or, at least, what it should mean, for you to be Christians in the sense in which Christ wants you to be Christians.

The spirit of Christianity, the true spirit of Christ, is a traditional thing, handed down from generation to generation and watched over by the Church of God; always in danger of being ignored or set aside or thrust into a secondary place when other things claim too much of our attention. We may be religious people and yet miss entirely the spirit of Christianity, as did the disciples at that stage of their development. Later, of course, they gained that spirit of Christ, they acquired that wonderful art of Christ. You know that art is a thing always in danger of distortion, of being profaned and debased; real art is a difficult treasure to hold securely; it is no small matter to keep an artistic

gift immune from the lowering influences of an antagonistic milieu. So likewise with the spirit of Christianity, which is so wonderful a thing, so great a treasure; and yet we, surrounded by lowering influences, by degrading milieux, are in constant danger of losing it, because we do not know of what spirit we are.

So you will have patience with me in my efforts during the days of the Retreat to make clear to you the meaning of this wonderful inheritance—the spirit of Christ, what it means, what it asks of you. It is a very deep psychological study in the highest sense; divine psychology, not human psychology.

We have in many respects to widen our hearts and minds immensely or we cannot enter into the true spirit of Christ. Which of us, had we been in that group of disciples, would not have joined in the cry: "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them"? And we should have enjoyed that mighty manifestation of divine power which would have vindicated the position of our Master in a positive, undeniable manner. But it would not have been the spirit of Christ; it would have saddened Him if the disciples had done it, He would have sorrowed for them. The spirit of Christ is a genius. It is a Divine Art.

CHAPTER II

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

ST. JOHN the Evangelist concludes his account of our Lord's act of wonderful condescension in washing the feet of His disciples with these words: "Know you what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord. And you say well: for so I am. If then I, being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."[1] Our Lord here makes a very definite and emphatic declaration of His real greatness. "You call me Master and Lord. And you say well: for so I am." He is the Lord, He is the Master, He is the Son of God, and His act of condescension is seen in its right perspective then only when they remember who is the One who does it.

Now, Christ's spirit, that spirit which is the essential characteristic of Christianity, is based primarily on this one great fact, that He, the Christ, the Son of God, is in full possession of all power in heaven and on earth, that He is full

[1] St. John xiii 12.

of grace and truth, that He is one with the Father, that the Father has given all things into His hands, that He is the infinitely holy One, that the spirit of darkness has in Him no possession whatever. "Which of you can accuse me of any sin?"[1] Christ is rich, Christ is great, powerful, and holy, and His spirit is known then only when we bear in mind this fundamental fact of His infinite greatness. Christ is infinitely powerful, infinitely holy, infinitely rich, all things are at His disposal; the heavens and the earth shall pass away, but not one single word of His shall pass away. The spirit of Christ, then, is essentially a spirit of magnanimity, a spirit of generosity, a spirit of eternal patience, because, being so powerful and so great, He can well afford to be patient. He is the Lord and Master, and He descends from the height of His dignity, never losing it, never diminishing it, but pouring infinite sweetness and sanctity into the smallest thing which He does for any of His beloved ones. Far be from us the spirit which would detract from the dignity of Christ's position or any conception of Him which is not based on the fundamental principle of His Divinity, of His equality with the Father, of His absolute sanctity, of His

[1] St. John viii 46.

supreme possession of all perfection. If the spirit of Christianity is a spirit of meekness, a spirit of endurance, a spirit of poverty, a spirit of humility, let us bear in mind that it is the meekness of the powerful, the endurance of the eternal, the poverty of the infinitely rich, the humility of the Lord of heaven and earth.

There is a tendency today to lower the conception of the Son of God to that of a wonderfully sweet man, an extremely patient man, one who has known all the troubles and even ignorances of human nature, who has struggled upwards and emerged triumphant. Of course, this is not the spirit of Christianity. The spirit of Christianity is one of absolute conviction as to His divine Nature. The spirit of Christianity has a deep sense of what we possess in Christ: we possess something infinitely holy, something that cannot pass away, that nothing can destroy. Christ is the Son of God made Man. We must start with that great assumption: "You know what I have done unto you," He says to His disciples. As if he should say: You may be surprised at my act, "You call me Master and Lord. And you say well: for so I am." At no time did our Lord diminish His claims or in any way belittle them. On the contrary, it was invariably His way to assert emphatically His

great position in the universe of God. Therefore, when we speak of the meekness or the mercifulness of the Christian spirit, we mean a very special thing. We do not mean any kind of meekness or mercy. We mean the meekness and the mercy of the Omnipotent, of the All-Holy; we mean the condescension of the Infinitely Exalted, we mean the patience of the One to whom all power has been given, who could act otherwise if He so willed, but who acts with such wonderful meekness just because He is so powerful. In the Old Testament, in the Book of Wisdom, we have that wonderful passage: "But thou being master of power, judgest with tranquillity; and with great favour disposest of us: for thy power is at hand when thou wilt."[1] That resourcefulness of God, that delicacy of His teaching, that art in dealing with our poor souls, all comes truly from His omnipotence. He could do differently, being so powerful, but He chooses the sweetest way of all; the way that must be successful in the end.

And so also with the spirit of the Church. It ought always to be based on the fundamental belief that we have been formed in Christ, that we have been elevated in Christ, that we are

[1] Wisd. xii 18.

made rich in Him, that we are members of His mystical Body; and our conduct should therefore be inspired by this supreme conviction of our supernatural greatness in Christ. We must be kind, patient, forbearing; and for no other reason than this, that, in the words of St. Paul, we are the elect of God. In his Epistle to the Colossians he refers the exercise of the Christian virtues to faith in this election: " Put ye on," he says, " as the elect of God, holy and beloved, the bowels of mercy, benignity, humility, modesty, patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another. Even as the Lord hath forgiven you, so do you also.[1] On that account, because we have that mighty spiritual possession, our incorporation in Christ, our union in Christ, we can afford to bear things patiently, to deal gently with everyone, to have those thoughts of mercy, long-suffering and tolerance, and to wait with the utmost confidence for the hour of God, knowing with absolute certainty that He cannot fail.

Such, then, is the fundamental principle of the Christian spirit, the spirit of Christ.

When the disciples in their ignorance desired to command fire from heaven, no doubt they thought that such a manifestation of Christ's

[1] Col. iii 12.

power would make a great impression on the Samaritans, whilst the punishment would convert them. Such were not the thoughts of Christ because He had at His disposal resources of which the disciples were not aware, because He had patience of a much more perfect nature. What, then, are the resources of Christ? They are the potentialities of His Divine grace, the power of the Holy Ghost, the infinitely sweet coercion of the spirit of love. See how He pleads with individuals, with whole nations, how He deals with them, not by physical might, but by the drawings of the Father in heaven, drawings which reach to the ends of the earth, which are mighty and which never fail.[1]

Here is an important consideration, indeed, if we wish to understand the Christian spirit, if we wish to foster it. Mere humanitarianism which is so much in vogue today is entirely devoid of that element of spiritual wealth, of that element of hope, of that element of confidence in some great power. Modern humanitarianism—kindness, let us call it—is based merely on a sense of human misery. We are all of us in such sad

[1] "No man can come to me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him. And I will raise him up in the last day."—St. John vi 44.

plight that we cannot but feel the promptings of mutual pity. Christian kindness, of course, also takes human misery into account, but its starting-point is not human misery. Christian kindness is founded on the possession of spiritual wealth, we are kind to each other through the fulness of our riches in Christ, we give of the abundance of our possessions. God is kind through the abundance of His essential love, He pours out His mercies upon all His creatures because He is infinitely rich in Himself. His children are given that spirit also; they are kind and merciful, forbearing and forgiving, simply because they themselves have been made so rich in Christ, because they have been united to that wonderful Power—the Son of God made Man; and in that power they find strength and courage to bear all things. The " charity which suffereth long and is kind " is a very positive power; the presence of the Holy Ghost in our souls makes us strong because it makes us rich.

So we must never give thought to a Christianity which does not start with the all-important principle that it is the power of God and the wisdom of God on which all our strength is based, as we read in the words of St. Paul. We are the rich people of God. We can,

without boasting, say that this is our conviction. We have been made rich in Christ, and all through his Epistles St. Paul freely appeals on the ground of that conviction, because he has been made rich in Christ. He reiterates the argument, because you are the firstfruits of redemption, be kind, be merciful; because you have been given so much, be forgiving, be generous. You were poor, you were wretched, you had nothing, now you possess all things; on account of that wonderful preference of God be also merciful to your fellow-creatures, who have not had your privileges, but who still belong to the family of God.

There is yet another phase of thought to which the spirit of Christianity is strongly opposed, and that is Buddhism, that exotic cult recently imported into England and very popular today, which makes a parade of virtues which have only a superficial resemblance to those of Christianity. There is much talk of the mercy and the kindness and humanity of the Buddhist, and people ask: "What has Christ done more than Buddha?" The difference is as great as that between heaven and earth, not to say between heaven and hell! In the Oriental religion there is no such thing as a concept of spiritual possession, no such thing as an ideal

of the Lord and Master, who is the glory of the Eternal, and has all the fulness of the Godhead. On the contrary, Buddhism starts with emptiness and ends with emptiness, mercy and kindness are mere accidents, so to speak, of that destitution; they do not originate in the consciousness of a higher possession. "We are merciful," say the Buddhists, "therefore let us show mercy"; or rather their dictum may be put thus: "If you are merciful, then you will show mercy," and with this empty tautology their teaching begins and ends.

On the other hand, Christianity says: "We are so rich, let us be kind; we are so powerful, let us be gentle; we have eternity before us, let us be patient; we are the elect of God, let us put on bowels of mercy." And the principle is evident at its source. Christ is the Lord and Master, therefore does He wash the feet of His disciples; He is God, the God of Love, therefore has He loved His own who were in the world. He is the Eternal, whose years cannot fail, therefore has He mercy upon man who is but as the breath of wind or as the grass that withereth. He waits with infinite patience because He loves man to come to Him, not through compulsion and force, but through the spontaneous action of love. This is the funda-

mental spirit of Christianity. It must never be overlooked.

If, during the last few weeks, you have followed in the English press the notices of the Life of St. Francis of Assisi, you will have observed the very thing to which I have already alluded. How many of his admirers were quite mistaken as to his true spiritual significance. They regarded him as one of the most lovable of men, himself an ardent lover of humanity for humanity's sake. This is not St. Francis. St. Francis was, before all, a man endowed with a mighty supernatural power because he was filled with that great wealth of spiritual things, because he had that great hope, that wonderful vision of heavenly things, because he had seen Christ. This is the St. Francis of Catholicism, whereas the Francis proposed to us by those writers to whom I have alluded is little better than a Buddhist.

Our Christian spirit, then, is based on the possession of a great spiritual treasure—nothing less than the glories of the kingdom of the children of God—on the possession of hopes which cannot pass away; so that, whatever we may be, whatever our conduct ought to be, it all ought to come from this mental conviction that we have been made rich in Christ. Christ

is the sweetest of all who have ever lived here on the earth because He is the mightiest, the holiest, the purest. He was full of grace and truth, and because He was such He could sympathise, He could show mercy as only the All-Merciful could.

CHAPTER III

THE WILL OF CHRIST

WHEN our blessed Lord entered into the dark valley of His passion and death, He entered it with the full consciousness that He was doing a free thing; that what He was to suffer had been accepted by Him freely as a sacrifice to the Heavenly Father for the ransom of our souls. There was no necessity, no blind fate at work; there was, on the contrary, supreme freedom. The merit of Christ's passion, like all merit, is based on freedom. If a thing is not free it is not meritorious, if it is not free it is not worthy. Where fate determines the issue there can be no spiritual nor moral value. Christianity always teaches this great principle of the freedom of choice; in it lies merit.

When our Lord, then, stepped forward into that terrible darkness, it was the act of an infinitely free man—free God, you may say. He was master both of His own spirit and of the situation; He had power, free power, to lay down His life, and He had power to take it up

again; He had the power which the Father had given Him.

Of course, with our extremely limited minds we cannot understand the interplay of those two great factors, the will of the Father and the freedom of the Son; but we know that, on the one hand, there was the will of the Father, and that, on the other, there was the freedom of the Son to reject that will, if He so willed. When joy was set before Him He chose the Cross. But, as I have said, we cannot understand the interaction of the two, we only know that they were there.

So our Lord entered with great serenity, with complete freedom, with firm purpose into the first phase of His sufferings. We have, at the very beginning of the Gospel narrative of the passion, reiterated admonitions lest we forget the original nature of Christ's passion. We have striking facts and words protesting Christ's freedom. When Judas had betrayed Him with a kiss, and the band of soldiers had surrounded Him, Peter, in his wonderful loyalty and his devotion to his divine Master, drew his sword, and striking at random, cut off the ear of one of the servants of the high priest. But our Lord, calm in the midst of the tumult, quietly bids him: " Put up thy sword in the scabbard. The

chalice which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it ?"[1]

Now all these utterances of Christ must be taken literally. He said to Peter, who was ready and eager to defend Him, that He did not want his help, generous though it was. " Thinkest thou that I cannot ask my Father, and He will give me presently more than twelve legions of angels ? How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that so it must be done ?"[2] This was no hyperbole. A word from Christ to His heavenly Father would have produced that manifestation of heavenly power. A legion was, as you know, a great multitude, the powerful instrument of the Roman domination; and not one legion only, but twelve ! What a mighty host ! And they would have come if Christ had but whispered that word. But what if those twelve legions of angels had come, what then ? We might almost say they would have spoilt the work of God. There was something far more wonderful to be done than the achievement of victory—the fulfilment of the Cross. What Cross ? The Cross of which we read in Isaiah and Jeremiah, the Cross which the Master Himself had foretold, that the Son of Man should be an outcast of the people, that

[1] St. John xviii 11. [2] St. Matt. xxvi 53.

He should be cut off from among the living. This was the Cross that was to be fulfilled, this the Cup which He had to drink. What a disaster if those twelve legions had come, if Christ had not drunk the chalice of His sufferings! How different would have been the future of the whole human race!

Then, to show more completely still the real spirit in which He entered into His passion, there was that double manifestation of His power, those who came to apprehend Him fell back like dead men, could not move, and it was only at His bidding that they were able to rise, to bind Him, and to lead Him prisoner. You see here the spirit of Christianity. A terrible thing is about to take place, our Lord calls it "the hour of the Prince of Darkness." It really was a triumph for the Prince of Darkness from one point of view. The Prince of Darkness was about to make his great stroke, his masterpiece, his final victory apparently, when he delivered up Christ to the power of the Jews. Had our Lord allowed the legions of angels to come it would indeed have been a victory over the powers of darkness, but ultimately what a defeat for us! See here the wonderful art of Christ, the mastery of the Son of God over the events of His life and of His death, that genius

by which He makes supremest victory out of what, according to human interpretation, is signal defeat. Christ could have commanded the angels to come, but that would have been as nothing to the great deed of drinking the cup, drinking down all our iniquities and washing away all our sin. A few hours later the Son of God stood before Pilate, the Roman Governor, who asked Him: "Art thou the King of the Jews? . . . Jesus answered: My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would certainly strive that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now my kingdom is not from hence."[1]

When our Lord speaks here of His servants, He speaks not of His disciples only, but of those invisible ministers by whom He was always surrounded, and who would have appeared at the manifestation of His power. But it was not His intention that His ministers should fight for Him; and why? "Because I come to give testimony to the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice." That sacred kingdom, then, is a kingdom of mind, of spirit, of truth, and the kingdom of truth cannot be established except in the mysterious way which Christ chose. A physical kingdom, or one of earthly

[1] St. John xviii 35.

authority, could have been set up by a heavenly manifestation, by great strokes of angelic power; but that kingdom which Christ came to found, that kingdom of truth, that great spiritual conviction which makes of Him the supremest Lord and Master of the world, could not be established except through His death, through His drinking the cup, through His giving a good testimony under Pontius Pilate. Christ's behaviour is the greatest testimony to the truth, far greater than the appearance of an angelic host. More truth, more persuasion, more life, more force, have come from the Cross of Christ than if the heavens had been opened and we had been allowed to see the spirit world.

Let us not lose sight of this, that we are dealing with the deepest and most incomprehensible of things when we are dealing with the human spirit, with the human mind. How can the human mind be won to truth, to faith, to loyalty to God? How is it possible for us to come to God, to surrender to Him our whole intellect, our whole will? We do not even ourselves know why we are loyal to one person and alienated from another, in sympathy with one person and opposed to another. God alone knows the working of the human soul; and God, who knows, who has made us, has thought out

His plan, the supreme plan, the good testimony of Christ before Pilate. In the words of St. Peter: " Christ died for our sins, the just for the unjust."[1] And by His death He achieved for truth its highest ascendency, an ascendency not otherwise to be obtained.

Here again we see the genius of Christianity, a wonderful understanding, we might almost say, on the part of God Himself, of man's real needs, man's real hunger and thirst. What is to win man back to God ? Not the authority of heaven, but the ignominy of Christ. St. Paul gives us the key to that when he says that it pleased God through the folly of the Cross to save souls. The folly of the Cross is a great psychological power, a great instrument of truth, which wins us and makes us loyal to Christ Himself; nothing else can achieve that. So that, once again, we ask ourselves: What is the true spirit of Christianity, the spirit to which we belong, of which we are ? If there are no prophecies about individual lives, evidently there are prophecies of the life of man as such, of the Christian man in the universal. We know what a Christian man ought to be. Your life, such as it is, is a pre-ordained thing, and it is for you to drink your cup even as Christ drank His. His life

[1] 1 Pet. iii 18.

and His death, if they apparently were failures, were not so in reality. We also are children of that divine Father who held to the lips of His Son a beverage to drink, and so our lives have a wonderful mysterious significance. And it is in this light that we ought to look at human things and be superior to them; never letting them overpower us, as if they were some dark arrangement, as if they were the result of some malign power. No, human things are the will of the Father for us as they were the will of the Father for His divine Son. On the one hand, you have the evil intentions of the enemies of Christ; on the other hand, you have the permission of the heavenly Father which was good, and that permissive will meant the Sacrifice by which we have all been redeemed. This, then, is the scale by which our lives must be gauged and interpreted—namely, that we have cups to drink and prophecies to fulfil each in his own sphere. This is the Christian spirit. You should take that straight, strong view of life and death, not a fatalistic, not a pessimistic view, but a most simple one. How natural it was to see Christ doing an act of kindness to the man whose ear had been cut off, healing him, although surrounded by those men who hated Him so bitterly, bidding Peter put up his sword into

its place, teaching him a lesson which will re-echo to the end of time.

This is the Christian spirit, the Christian art. Let it be our spirit, our art, for it is a real art to learn our life in the lesson of Christ's life, and few people acquire it. To know life is real art; to understand our existence is the true Christian genius, is the Christian spirit which we all ought to possess, and which is truly the inheritance of the saints.

CHAPTER IV

THE PATIENCE OF CHRIST

ALL through the sacred Gospels our Lord insists, now in one way, now in another, upon this, that He has complete power not only over good, but also over evil, that all things are subject to Him, and that in this He shows Himself to be truly God, because it is God alone who can control alike evil and good. Evil, be it of the material or spiritual order, is not beyond the control of God; it cannot be. This very definite view, therefore, is characteristic of Christianity, that we are not overpowered by evil, nor overcome by it. On the contrary, good may overcome evil; Christians may overcome sin by grace, and sin is thus almost made into a servant of justice. Such is the perfection of Christ, such the power of His spirit, that sin has a positive side, and may foster justice through the great graces of repentance.

Whenever heresies arise in Christendom, you may say without fear of being wrong that someone has taken an exaggerated notion of evil, has

no patience with evil, wants to make a clear separation between it and good. But God and His Christ have an infinite patience with evil; They do not make a manifest separation between the two here on earth, but in Their mysterious providence let both grow together for the sake of good.

We all know the parable of the wheat and the tares. A sower went forth to sow good seed. But, when his servants were asleep, an enemy came, and with positive perverseness sowed cockle over the wheat. It was an act of malice done at night, a deliberate, well-timed act on the part of the enemy; and then we read how the seed grew into the blade, and the blade, ripening, brought forth not only wheat but cockle also. Seeing what had happened, the servants of the man who had sowed the wheat were greatly astonished, and went to their master, saying: " Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? Whence, then, hath it cockle? And he said to them: An enemy hath done this. And the servants said to him: Wilt thou that we go and gather it up? And he said: No, lest perhaps gathering up the cockle, you root up the wheat also together with it. Suffer both to grow until the harvest, and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers: Gather

up first the cockle and bind it into bundles to burn, but the wheat gather ye into my barn."[1]

Did Christ sow anything but good seed? How is it then that there is cockle in the good field of His Church? We learn the answer from the words of the parable: "An enemy hath done this." The cockle is not a mere accident, a by-product, so to speak, of the wheat. It is the result of a definite act, of a definite enemy; someone has been at work there, some evil one has sown it. Then when the servants hear that this is the direct work of an enemy they ask leave to go at once and root out the cockle and burn it, and they put it very emphatically. They were loyal men, and they meant well. But hear the answer of their lord, a wonderful answer; only God can give such answers. "No," said the master, "lest while rooting up the cockle you also root up the wheat. Let both grow together until the harvest; then I will tell my servants to gather the wheat into my barns." What a divine plan, what a revelation! What a glorious art of God our blessed Lord puts before us in this parable! "No," He said, "do not root up the evil, do not destroy the evil." Why not? A very simple yet a very definite reason. In rooting up the

[1] St. Matt. xiii 27-30.

evil there is the danger of rooting up also the good; not only would the weeds be thinned out, but possibly also the precious wheat. As if the servants, however perfect, however careful, however accomplished, could not handle that great problem of free-will, of good-will and bad-will, of truth and error. It is so difficult a problem that it had better be left to work itself out. Let all wait till the time of harvest, when the conditions are completely altered; then the reapers will have thrust in their sickles and the wheat and the cockle will have been cut from the ground in which they grew together, from which they drew their nourishment. It will be easier then for the band of reapers to separate the two, pulling them asunder as they lie there in the sun, laying on the one hand the glorious sheaves of wheat, and on the other the bundles of cockle. When done thus at the time of harvest there is no danger of rooting up the wheat; if done before, there is great risk of loss. Our Lord is concerned with one thing only, not to lose any of His wheat. The cockle springing up is nothing, it cannot stifle the wheat, the wheat will grow of its own strength.

This is how God deals with the world. This is how we must look at the wonderful plan of God. This, again, is the true spirit of Chris-

tianity, a spirit of patience. Based on what? On mere inactivity? No; it is a patience based on a clear foreknowledge of what will happen one day; a patience founded on zeal. This patience is not inertness or lack of interest. On the contrary, the servants were good men, extremely keen on the success of the harvest; they were ready to hasten into the field and begin pulling up the weed. But the master holds them back. "No, not now," he says, "just wait until the harvest, only a few months more, and then the separation of the wheat and the cockle will be quite easy, and there will be no danger of losing one single grain of my wheat."

This is the patience of the saints, of Christianity. It does not expect an ideal world, an ideal Church, in which there is no scandal, no difficulty; it does not expect a human life in which there are no shadows, no sins; or if it expects such things it looks for them only as the consummation of the harvest. But now the two things are growing up together, feeding on the same soil, for cockle evidently thrives on the very thing the householder has prepared for the wheat, the good field. The enemy who sowed by night never ploughed, he never harrowed the field, never enriched it with any-

thing that would make the soil fatter, never picked out a stone to free the surface for the tender blade; he did no work, but simply came at night when everybody else was asleep and ran to and fro, scattering and sowing his cockle. This is what evil does, this is what evil people do. They never work, they make no toilsome preparations, never till their own soil; they always make use of that wonderful ground which God has prepared; they make use of the Christian ideals, Christian principles, Christian sentiments, and sow difficulties and doubts in the hearts and minds prepared by Christ. That is the only thing they can do, perverse work, sowing cockles. Never did Satan work, so to speak; he has never produced anything, but only tried to poison what the good God has created. Yet, with all that, in the providence of the heavenly Father, no true evil comes out of it. The cockle will be burned—it is cockle, it is its fate; but the purpose of the Father is not frustrated, and His harvest is not diminished.

This is one of the great discourses of Christ in which He reveals His art; one of His masterpieces, in which he teaches us how to look at things, how to be patient. It is a certain truth that if God in His providence exterminated every evil deed at once, killed every evil-doer, the

final sum of goodness would be less. We have our Lord's own words for it; there would be diminution. Goodness itself, sanctity itself, is fostered by the proximity of evil. As St Augustine puts it so well: it pleased God to make good come out of evil rather than to abolish all evil. God could have abolished all evil in His omnipotence; He did not; He did the better thing: He made good come out of evil, He makes sanctity come out of it; makes martyrs through the cruelty of man, and gives His Church the most glorious traditions of fortitude and courage through the very presence of enemies in her midst and around her walls. When the great day of harvest comes sanctity will be found to be so great and so high by very reason of the wickedness that encompassed it.

Our lives are constantly bound up with those of other people in some way or another. Perhaps those people fail in many things, but they are in some way a portion of our own lives; they partake of the graces we possess. "The faithless husband," says St. Paul, "will be sanctified through the believing wife."[1] The children of believers are sanctified through the very fact of their paternity. One person in a family may be the salvation of the whole family,

[1] 1 Cor. vii 14.

though it may not be given to him to see the final issues and the ultimate results. But there is the fact—an absolute certainty, goodness inevitably produces goodness; it is unconquerable, it cannot be stifled, it has greater ramifications than evil can ever have. There are people who seem to look at evil from the point of view of evil, of sin. Now that is not a Christian attitude. The Christian attitude should be this: one saint outweighs a hundred, a thousand, perhaps a million sinners. The sanctity of one saint prevails over the sinfulness of a thousand sinners. Sin is negative; sanctity, positive. Sanctity is more powerful than sin; sanctity is, in fact, the only real power. The strength of evil is merely accidental, it has no real power.

Accordingly, our whole Christian outlook should be an outlook of goodness, an outlook of sanctity. We should think first and foremost of sanctity and the power of sanctity, which is the power of Christ. We are not meant to be made gloomy by the multiplicity of sin. We know that all sin has been destroyed by Christ when, as St. Peter tells us, He destroyed it by His own death. Sanctity is the natural atmosphere of Christians; it is their daily life. They are born into sanctity when they are baptised; they are kept in sanctity through the manifold graces of

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the sacraments and through the daily cleansing of Holy Mass, surrounded on all sides by the angels who illumine their minds and strengthen their will. The ordinary state of Christians is a state of sanctity. If you were given a vision of the Catholic people no doubt you might see many souls for the moment in a state of mortal sin; but if you saw the Christian people in their millions, what a spectacle it would be! The amount of grace that goes up to heaven; the purity of their lives; their patience; how near to God they are; how the power of Christ pours into them like a mighty stream which never ceases to flow; how even the sinner is constantly being brought into the waters of grace again; if there is a fall, at once that fall is made good by the grace of repentance; how when a believing Catholic falls we have the one Sacrifice for sin; the angels go and whisper to him words of repentance and contrition, and he rises as quickly as he fell. Oh, if we could but see that great spectacle!

Such should be our thoughts, thus should we think of Christ and His work. Do not think of the world and its evils. Do not think of infidelity and apostasy; these are but incidental things which our heavenly Father allows, the growth of the cockle. But what should interest

you and be the subject of your constant contemplation and thought are the glories of the fidelity of the Church of Christ, of those millions all over the world who love our Lord Jesus Christ and adore Him; who go to Communion every day; who have faith in His Flesh and Blood. This should be our normal atmosphere; this is what the Psalmist calls us to think upon: the Lord and His goodness above all things. Begin with goodness, with sanctity, with the thought of God, and that you are the children of God. Begin with grace, not with sin and apostasy and infidelity; these things need not enter into your lives; you know that they exist, but they need not affect you. What should affect you is the power of Christ, the power of sanctity, the growth of the heavenly harvest. You see the blade and the ripe ear, why trouble about the cockle ? Leave it until the great day of harvest when the Master will know what to do with it. As for yourselves, you are " God's husbandry, you are the plantation of God, trees of God, the pure fruits of God, and you have been planted in the very paradise of God."

CHAPTER V

THE STANDARD OF PERFECTION

" Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect."—*St. Matt.* v 48.

THESE words, isolated from their context, have often puzzled people. Is it not asking too much of a mere creature to be perfect as the Creator Himself? Is it not an exaggerated ideal to aim at the perfection of God? Yet there is nothing more dangerous than to take from the Gospel anything but the literal meaning. If once you begin to give your own interpretation to the words of our Lord you are in very great danger. So this text: " Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect," is indeed a most instructive thing to consider. Our Lord said it. In what connexion? You will find that our Lord is literal, that He wishes to be taken literally.

" Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect." Our Lord uses the words apropos of the way in which the heavenly Father deals with mankind. " Be

children," He says, " of your Father who is in heaven, who maketh his sun to rise upon the good and the bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust." And it is precisely this kindness and charity of the heavenly Father, who has His own ways, who is supreme in His dispensations, who does not follow human laws and human ways, but who, on the contrary, has ways of His own, which we are bidden to imitate. And what are the ways of God ? " He maketh his sun to shine upon the good and the bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust,"[1] as if there were no differences in that wonderful patience of His, in the infinite respect He has for the free-will of His creatures. That is the spirit of God, of the heavenly Father of the Christ, the spirit of Christianity.

Now our Lord says that we can imitate the heavenly Father literally: that we have a chance of being absolutely divine in our behaviour, of imitating the art of God Himself. " Be you perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect," by doing in your own sphere as the heavenly Father does in His. You know the full text: " For if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have ? Do not even the publicans this ? And if you salute your brethren only,

[1] St. Matt. v 45.

what do you more? Do not also the heathens this? Be you perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect."[1]

You see at once the divine comfort we have in this matter. We can really be God-like. Do you not see in this what a wonderful opportunity we have to be perfect in all things? Much is said about perfection. All sorts and degrees of perfection are put before you, and these doctrines and teachings indeed are helpful, but let us always come back to the fundamental things of the sacred Gospel, to the perfection which the Son of God Himself preaches, literal perfection, complete perfection, so that we are perfect and complete, just like God. In God there is no resentment; there are no rancours in God, no hatreds, no jealousies. There are no reserves of love, for He raineth upon the just and the unjust and maketh His sun to shine equally on both. These are God's ways, this is the art of God. And how successful He is! How securely He triumphs in the end; just because He has that supreme perseverance and tolerance with His creatures, good or bad as they may be. And we, too, can do it in our own sphere, literally, like God; the opportunity is not wanting. We

[1] St. Matt. v 46-48.

have to live with our fellow-men, with the good and the bad, with those whom we naturally like and those whom we dislike. Let our dealings with them be forbearing and charitable. Let us do good to all indifferently, and so reflect in ourselves the perfection wherewith the heavenly Father Himself is perfect.

This, then, is how we are to be spiritual, this is how we are to be perfect, to be divine; this is how we are to be superior to all things. All revelations, all ecstasies, are small in comparison with that perfection, which is the perfection of the heavenly Father Himself.

CHAPTER VI

THE ART OF WORSHIP

ONE day our Lord was resting by Jacob's well when a woman of Samaria came down to draw water. You know the beautiful story, how, having asked her to give Him to drink and so entered into conversation with her, our Lord went on—I might almost say in a playful manner—to bid her fetch her husband, and her reply: "I have no husband," and then the swift word: "Yes, thou hast had five husbands, and the one whom thou hast now is not thy husband." Then the woman said, displaying a very common trait of character, "Sir, I see that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and you say that men must worship the Lord God in Jerusalem." The fact was that our Lord's remarks were too pointedly personal for her, so she thought the best thing would be to lead Him into a theological controversy, and so escape from the rather embarrassing subject of her private life. It was a happy turn of the conversation she considered, this reference to

the crucial controversy that divided the Jews and the Samaritans, where God was to be worshipped. But our Lord took the very theme which she suggested to lead up to her conversion. " Believe me," He said, " that the hour cometh when you shall neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem adore the Father. You adore that which you know not; we adore that which we know. For salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh and now is, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father also seeketh such to adore him. God is a spirit, and they that adore him must adore him in spirit and in truth. The woman said: I know that Messias cometh (which is called Christ): therefore, when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus said to her: I am he, who am speaking with thee."[1]

The doctrine which our Lord put forth under these very telling circumstances is a thing which ought to have a great influence in our own lives. The true adorer adores the Lord in spirit and in truth because God is a spirit. The doctrine has constantly been distorted. It is the favourite text in all periods, at all times, of those who condemn external worship, external forms of religion, because, say they, you must adore God

[1] St. John iv 5.

in spirit and in truth. Of course, we know that our Lord could not mean any such thing, because we know that the religion which He left behind is not only a religion of spirit and truth, but also a religion of external forms; yet the lesson contained in these words is necessary for our instruction; we also must learn how to adore in spirit and in truth. Our Lord tells us that the Father seeks such adorers, as if He were desirous for His children to possess the art of adoring Him aright.

The Samaritans had but a low ideal of worship. They thought that God could only be adored on their own mountain, that He could not be honoured unless people came to that mountain to honour Him. The Jews were not so narrow-minded; and the importance they attached to Jerusalem as the divinely-appointed place of worship was justified by our Lord's words: " We adore that which we know. For salvation is of the Jews." God's salvation would come from Jerusalem; but the Jews were one-sided, they attached to their religion an element of nationalism, a material element, which tended to make them unspiritual.

So Christianity must be a religion of spirit and truth. The Father has desired to have such adorers. How beautiful that God seeks

for—shall we say—cultivated adorers, to whom adoration and worship is not a mere transient act, a thing of locality and external circumstance, but to whom adoration and worship is their life, their breath, going with them wherever they go, with them at all times. God is Spirit; He is not circumscribed by any external form; and those who resemble Him, know Him in spirit and in truth.

Let us consider what it is to adore God in truth. Christianity is a thing of the mind, and the more you have of Christian doctrine, of the Christian mind, the nearer you are to the type of worshipper whom the heavenly Father seeks to adore Him. Your religion must be a religion of the mind, and the more it is so, the more strength, the more consolation it will give you. It is not only a thing of tradition, a thing of external practice, it must be a thing of the mind, of truth. You ought to know much about your religion, the doctrines of Christianity should be your principal study. You should love to hear instruction, to read good books. If your mind is devoid of such knowledge, of that Christian education, you will become critical and intolerant; you will limit yourself to a few external practices and remain extremely ignorant. There is nothing more

distressing than to come across pious fools, whose religious mentality is not properly developed. They are a great trial, for really piety without education is a dangerous thing; it generates narrowness, and almost always results in uncharitableness of disposition. The ideal Catholic is essentially one who has had a good religious education, who has deep convictions, who, I might almost say, rejoices in theological things; to whom the mysteries of the faith are the greatest of all truths; who rejoices in the celebration of those mysteries as they recur in the liturgical year; to whom Christmas is not only an external festival, but a feast for the mind dwelling on the Incarnation; to whom the death of Christ is a mystery; to whom the Resurrection is not a mere event in the Christian year, but a real spiritual elevation, a source of interior spiritual joy. And so on. This is the educated Catholic; this is the adorer in truth. It is quite useless for us preachers to urge you to practise certain small devotions, or to teach you certain secondary virtues, if at the same time we cannot bring home to you the great truths of Catholicism. The Lord preserve us from a narrow spirit, from a faith which would be content with external practices without knowledge.

One thing is evident, standing out like a beacon of light in this world, and that is that, of all church-going people, Catholics have not only external practice but also have internal instruction. How very little doctrinal instruction there is in the non-Catholic sects, even if they are still church-going folk. Doctrine has been taken from them. But amongst Catholics there is really a wonderful wealth of intellectual information in matters of religion. These are the real children of God, the real citizens of the heavenly kingdom; having this wonderful fund of information, they are able to cope with difficulties, to withstand the stress and strain of life; they are not easily overcome by temptation, being illumined from on high.

On the other hand, the greatest source of weakness for all of us is our ignorance of the things of religion. When we are well informed we may have temptations, yet there is a strength in our very information which will bear us through many difficulties.

So let us worship the Father in truth. Let us avoid all religion which has not that wonderful basis of truth of which I spoke in the first conference, that wealth of light which is the root of all our Christian art, our Christian behaviour, our Christian spirit.

Then you must adore the Father in spirit. Here by spirit is not meant that exclusive thing which breeds puritanism. To adore in spirit does not mean that we must adore only with the spirit, only with that refined portion of our being which is defined as spirit. No, we have received the precept to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with our whole mind; our whole being must be drawn into it. To adore in spirit does not mean the elimination of all external worship. To adore in spirit means to have as our final purpose in all things a spiritual insight, to see the things of the spirit, to believe in the world of the spirit, to have absolute faith that, besides the material world, there is a spiritual world, infinitely greater; that the material world, whatever its bulk, is made subservient to the spiritual world. This it is to adore in spirit, to make the spirit the supreme thing, to know that there is a world of spirits, and that God, who is spirit, is the King of that mighty world; that the material world is merely the servant of the spiritual world, and that in religion material things are merely helps and props to spiritual things. This is why Catholicism is the most spiritual of religions; it makes all the things of earth subservient to the ultimate issues of the

spiritual kingdom of God. This is how we worship God in spirit and in truth. This is truly the Christian art; to combine everything into one mighty beam of light; whether the things be material or spiritual, temporal or eternal, we gather up everything into the one great focus, and there comes forth a mighty light, worship, adoration. We prostrate ourselves before God in our bodily frame, and we give Him the homage of our minds. We humble ourselves before God, because He has been so gracious to us.

This is the wonderful genius of Catholicism, to make our human lives complete. There is nothing in your daily life which cannot be made the worship of God in spirit and in truth. You know God in your mind, and your external actions are transformed into the service of God. You have your external worship, but an external worship which has an internal reality in the Holy Ghost. You know the Holy Spirit is with us, so that whatever we do in external symbolism has its internal significance. When we assist at Holy Mass with its various rites and ceremonies of external worship, we know that behind all and in it all is an infinitely spiritual thing—the Body and Blood of our Lord offered up in sacrifice. And so your whole life has

the nobility which belongs to the children of God. The Father seeks such adorers—a beautiful saying, I repeat—illumined children who stand before Him at all times in the loyalty of their mind, the purity of their body, the service of their hands, the worship of their lips; ready to work for Him everywhere, and at all times; they are not tied down to any special form of life, or to any special place; they can be holy everywhere, under every circumstance. They are holy in the cloister, they are holy in the world; they are holy in the single state of virginity, or in matrimony. Everything is sanctified in the spirit of God and in the truth of the Gospel. They are holy in youth and in old age; their death is holy; their vigour of life is holy. The great genius of the Christian spirit of Catholicism is that it has been thus able to sanctify everything.

If you diagnose the mental or the religious state of the people with whom you are constantly in contact, Protestants mostly, or people without any definite religion, yet who have a kind of religious tendency or religiosity, you will always find this fundamental condition: they are very embarrassed in their religion; they do not know what to do, and it practically becomes only a Sunday performance, not a

transformation of their lives. They are very awkward in their prayers; even if they mean well, they can hardly be religious; one pities them as one would pity a lame man who would walk but cannot, or one dumb, who would like to pray but does not know how. They have aspirations but cannot express them. They are quite surprised when they see religion entering into the everyday life; they are tremendously impressed by the activities of a religious community, where everyone is busy, where worship is the ordinary atmosphere, and yet where everything else, farm work, or building and gardening, goes on in the midst of it. Recently I was going round our Abbey, where things are done in spirit and in truth; monks were there at work, carpenters and builders, and the brothers busy in the cow-houses, and yet everywhere was the sense that it was a religious place. The friend who was with me said, half wistfully: "Why can we not do such things?" Yes, why cannot others combine work and religion in this way? Protestantism has wrought this separation, has practically paralysed the bulk of the British nation; spiritually, genuine religion is lost, and the power to worship the Father in spirit and in truth. Whereas Catholicism has maintained that

admirable union between the spiritual and the material, between the internal and the external, between the ordinary life and the heavenly life.

Today we have the feast of a wonderful saint, a most exquisite personification of that spirit of Catholicism, St. Edward, whose relics we still venerate at Westminster Abbey. Right back in the Middle Ages—the dark ages they were called—you have that Anglo-Saxon King, a man of varied fortunes, now an exile, now a king; now successful, now overwhelmed by the adversity of circumstances. You have in that holy man a most sweet blending of everything that is heavenly, that is spiritual and of a most perfect prudence; a true king, one of England's best monarchs, fighting the battles of his country, associating with all the powers of his time, and yet keeping his mind so free. His life reads like the history of a modern nun in a convent. He has visions, sees angels, has a devotion to St. John the Evangelist, speaks of him as his bosom friend. One day a beggar asks of him an alms in the name of St. John, and the king takes a precious ring from his finger and bestows it in the name of the saint. The next day an angel brings back the ring. And yet this king is a fighter, used to the harsh tumult of war. Where can we find such a

splendid life? Where can we learn the art, the genius, of such a life? Where but in the Catholic Church? There have been other religious-minded kings, but their lives are as dull as can be, because their religion was a stunted, helpless thing; they could not help themselves, they knew no better. The fact is the art of life is a divine art, and if you interfere with the spirit of Catholicism, with that heavenly psychology of Christ, none can foretell the issue. This, then, should be our great desire: that we may be amongst those whom the Father seeks. All the great men who have fought the battles of the Lord have been men who knew the art of Christ.

Although your lives are in the world, that does not make any difference to your spiritual fortune, to your chances of salvation. You are where you are meant to be. Your life is as complete a life as any religious vocation, only in a different sphere, a life ordained by God and prepared by Him. And there is in your interior life as much grace as in that of any priest or religious, as much as in the life of St. Edward. If there was about his life an aroma of sanctity and of sweetness, so there can also be about yours, since you are, as he was, worshippers of the Father in spirit and in truth.

CHAPTER VII

CHRISTIAN MANNERS

WE have in the sacred Gospels more than one incident which may be called the lesson of Christian manners. Our Lord taught His disciples truly spiritual manners, how to behave courteously in the Church of God. It is not enough to be loyal to Him and to work for Him; we must also have ways and manners with each other in things spiritual. In temporal things we know the law of courtesy, there is also the courtesy of the Spirit, the courtesy of the Kingdom of Grace.

One day when our Lord was alone for a moment He was approached by a relative of His, the mother of the two sons of Zebedee, John and James.[1] She had evidently been watching for an opportunity to find the great Rabbi by Himself; she would never have dared to approach Him when the other disciples were around Him. The Gospel says that she came and asked Him something; the request

[1] St. Matt. xx 20.

must have been very tentative, more perhaps by wistful glance than by speech. She began very far off and would not come to the point. Jesus said to her: "What is it? what wilt thou?" She said to Him: "Say that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand and the other on thy left, in thy kingdom." She believed, like all her generation, in the immediate coming of the Messiah and His kingdom. But our Lord said to her: "You know not what you ask. Can you drink the chalice that I drink?" Instead of that immediate kingdom there is something very different in the future. It is the chalice, the cup which even the legions of angels would not have snatched from Him. That is the great business of Christ on earth—drinking the cup. Can you do that? That is true power, spiritual power, to be able to drink that cup. Of course, the two youths, not knowing what was forthcoming, declared themselves capable of anything. Our Lord very graciously said to them: "You shall drink my cup"—and, as we know, the two sons of Zebedee afterwards suffered martyrdom—"but to sit on my right or my left hand is not mine to give you, but to them for whom it is prepared by my Father."

You see here our Lord's manners. To

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begin with, the woman's were bad enough; the two youths were not so bad; anyhow, they were ready to take a risk. But see our Lord's wonderful reserve; He, the Son of God, says that in the spiritual order there are things which are entirely at the disposition of God in His own profound counsels, in the Trinity. Even He, in His human capacity, as the Son of man, has nothing to say in the matter. He submits to His Father's decision, to His Father's predestination. And although He gives His disciples every opportunity to serve Him, there are always higher and deeper considerations which must rule everything, and before which everybody has to bow, and He, Himself, the Son of God, bows before these decisions of the heavenly Father. As God, of course, He makes these decisions, as man He bows before them. There is in our Lord's speech a wonderful modesty, a wonderful reserve in these high things of predestination, of purity, of grace, letting God Himself settle the measure of grace and the height of sanctity to which a saint may be raised, not interfering with those profound decisions which no creature can fathom, but submitting humbly to them.

Now it was to be expected that the disciples would hear of what had occurred. Perhaps

the two youths were still feeling that even if they could not sit on the right and left hand of the Lord they would have a privileged place. Be that as it may, we are told that " the ten, hearing it, were moved with indignation against the two brethren." You can imagine how Peter and the other Apostles would talk of the presumption of these two youths, who had, as it were, stolen a march on them. Our Lord was evidently not amongst them as they discussed the affair. But afterwards He called them, and said: " You know that the princes of the Gentiles lord it over them, and they that are the greater exercise power upon them. It shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be the greater among you, let him be your minister. And he that will be first among you shall be your servant. Even as the Son of man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a redemption for many."

These are the manners of the kingdom of grace. First of all, a wonderful modesty of judgement in all things concerning the designs of God. Our Lord is reserved in His speech. He says that He Himself cannot give that place to the two disciples; but the Father will give it to those whom they do not even suspect. To whom will that place be given ? Our Lord

would not reveal that secret counsel of God; some profound predestination was the ultimate verdict in that matter.

Likewise we must be ready to let Almighty God work His own good will; be prepared to admit that He may give great graces to other people; that He may convert sinners at the last moment of their lives by some extraordinary grace. We bow before these inscrutable judgements of God. We do not want God to give an explanation of everything He asks us to do; we accept those differences which are so evident in this world, and which are most certainly the work of God. There are the rich and poor, those who are favoured by fortune and those who seem to be the victims of so many mishaps. We do not assume that we ought to understand these things; we leave them to God. He has wonderful designs, mysteries of predestination. He creates the poor and the rich; the poor in grace and the rich in grace. He gives to one generation of Christians privileges which He does not grant to another generation. Let us bow before these mysteries of the divine Will, as Christ bowed before them.

Now it is a wrong frame of mind when people seek to extract from God a full account of all His doings, to require of Him to explain why

He acts in this way or in that, as if God should not be allowed freedom in His dealings with men, as if He must give the same to all without preference. Such a frame of mind is very unchristian, it is in direct opposition to the whole spirit of the sacred Gospels. God has reserved to Himself great mysteries of grace, and let us bow before these mysteries. Let us do as did St. Joseph when he knew that Mary was with child and he could not understand it; he did not judge, he knew there was something divine, something beautiful, something pure, and he bowed before that great mystery.

So we must treat everybody more or less as an enigma. You cannot expect to read your fellow-Catholics and friends as you would read an open book. In the life of us all there are things incommunicable, things which you cannot expect your friends to reveal to you; the dealings of God with each individual soul are too sacred to be told even to the closest friend. Not knowing the life of anybody completely, let us reverence the hidden mystery where God has His own designs, His own ways. There may be sins and infidelities which are unknown, because these very sins and infidelities may prove for that soul occasions of sanctity, revival of the supernatural life, and it is not for us to know these things.

There is nothing worse, no worse manners, than to desire to pry into everybody's actions, as if there were nothing in our own souls which could not be published from the housetop. There are hidden things in every soul. Better that each one should be left to himself, understanding that his fellow-Christian is as much under the influence of divine grace as he himself. Then there must be that readiness of service, because we know that all our fellow-Catholics are children of God. Let us avoid those conditions of the heathen of which our Lord speaks, those desires of pre-eminence and superiority of power. It is so painful to hear from the lips of Catholics sentiments which are entirely pagan in their origin, in their tendency and spirit; social pride of position and exclusiveness, which come really from social snobbery. It is indeed distressing to find people who go to Holy Communion frequently, and may be admirable in other respects, utter pagans in the matter of social superiority. And it is to be feared that this holds true of the vast majority in this country. Their outlook is pagan. We are forcibly reminded of the words of our Lord: "The princes of the Gentiles lord it over them, and they that are the greater exercise power upon them." This is how they maintain their superi-

ority, by exercising their power and lording it over those who are not so advantageously placed.

If you belong to a higher state of society, remember that God has placed you there in His own kindness, for some good purpose, and think of that station as a mere dispensation, an opportunity for well-doing. Do not you become pagan, do not yourselves accept those pagan principles which are the framework of modern society. These are the manners of divine grace: that in all things you should be meek and humble, and not think too much of those social distinctions.

How painful to the Heart of Jesus when He sees His dear ones growing indignant, as did the disciples, over some social preferences, when He sees the freezing attitude of that woman who was at Holy Communion this morning to another woman who was also at Holy Communion, just because she is not of the same social rank, or for some other trivial social reason. Such conduct is pagan, and how much paganism there is around you! Be frank, admit your dangers. Admit the fact that you are surrounded on all sides by a spirit which is the spirit of the Gentiles, not the spirit of Christ. Let us learn from Christ, not only to be ministered unto, but to minister, for He laid down

His life for the redemption of humanity; He, the Lord and Master, King of heaven and earth, was modest, kind, and considerate. Cannot we imitate Him? Cannot we acquire the manners of the Gospel—infinite reverence for the things of God, for the Will of God, generosity in admitting the good qualities and graces of other people, readiness to let other people have the first place, content ourselves with the second; joy in the success of others, joy in their good name? Avoid all jealousies. There is nothing more disedifying, more painful, than jealousies about spiritual things, jealousies about priests, jealousies about spiritual friendships. We become jealous through the very fact of being in the house of God; the proximity of holy things produces an atmosphere of jealousy if we are not watchful. How much we all need those splendid manners of Christ, who, though He was the greatest of all, came not to be ministered unto but to minister, to make Himself the servant of all, even to lay down His life for them upon the Cross.

VIII

THE GENIUS OF PRAYER

CHRISTIAN prayer is indeed one of the great Christian arts, one of the things which truly show of what spirit we are. In nothing do we show our real spirit, our real genius, more than in the gift of prayer.

Our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount emphatically discards two sorts of prayer as being unworthy of His children, the prayer of the hypocrites and the prayer of the heathen. He says: "And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites that love to stand and pray in the synagogues and corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men: Amen I say to you, they have received their reward. But thou, when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber, and, having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee."[1]

Here we have first the prayer which is a corruption of a good thing. Our Lord alludes to the hypocrites of His time, to those who made

[1] St. Matt. vi 5.

of religion a great parade, a great boast; for when a nation is a religious nation it is a great advantage for a man to be thought religious. The Jewish nation was a theocracy, and therefore external religion was in danger of becoming a pose, which would receive its reward at once in the estimation of many.

And there you have those hypocrites; perhaps they deceived themselves, perhaps they were not clearly aware how warped their mental attitude was; but they loved to stand in the synagogues with arms outstretched, or at the street corners, pronouncing their prayers with great emphasis, while people observed them and had a kind of reverence for them. But our Lord said: "Amen I say to you, they have received their reward."

But His own must adopt a different attitude. Real prayer is essentially a thing of the heart; they must enter into their secret chamber, and, having closed their door, pray to their Father in secret, and He, who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, hears their prayer and repays them. He hears their prayer and is glorified in their act of simple, genuine directness.

You will, of course, understand that our Lord does not in any way disparage the public prayer of His Church. But what He seeks to empha-

sise above all is the personal character of prayer, that prayer cannot be a thing of fashion or tradition, that prayer cannot be a policy. Prayer must be a thing that comes from the heart of man, whether many come together to pray or whether one prays alone. It must be a thing which they are quite ready to do in secret, without anybody watching them. If their prayer depends upon the approval of men, it has no value in the sight of God.

The second prayer which our Lord discards is the prayer of the heathens. He goes on to say: "And when you are praying, speak not much, as the heathens. For they think that in their much speaking they may be heard. Be not you, therefore, like them: for your Father knoweth what is needful for you, before you ask him."

Here is a truly striking admonition, that prayer may be heathenish, entirely devoid of that spirit which makes Christianity what it is, a mechanical prayer, a prayer which completely ignores the nature of God, the prayer of the heathens, who think that by much speaking they may be heard, as if God had to be aroused, had to be reminded of His business by the loud cries of men. Such prayer is essentially founded on an ignorance of God, on a narrowing down

of the idea of God. You all remember that wonderful passage in the third Book of Kings when Elias was preparing his master-stroke of prophecy on Mount Carmel. There were the false prophets of Jezabel on the one hand, and the people of God on the other. It was to be a crucial test to show on which side was the truth. Elias allows the false prophets—there were 400 of them—to make the first essay. Their altar was erected, the prophet himself gave the ox to immolate, and they dressed it and prepared it, and early in the morning they cried to Baal, their god; and they cried themselves hoarse, and leaped on the altar, and there was no answer to their cry. And at the hour of noon Elias, the great prophet (he was a great wit, too, it would seem) mockingly bade them cry louder, " If there be a god, perhaps he is talking, or is in an inn, or on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be wakened." You see the prophet points out the very thing to which our Lord refers in the Sermon on the Mount, that profound ignorance of the true nature of God which is native to paganism. Paganism is a materialistic view of life, a mechanical concept of things. And so these poor deluded prophets of Baal went on cutting themselves with knives and lancets according to their fashion until they

were covered with blood. But there was no voice nor any that answered, for there was none to hear. Strange to say, this form of fanaticism has never died out. The other day I read in *The Times* an account of a traveller in Northern Africa. He was present at a Moslem festival, and the same rite was carried out by a troop of men shouting themselves hoarse from morning till night, and covering themselves with their own blood. A very strange and unaccountable psychology this exultation which works itself into a delirium, and which is found in all heathen countries; as if man, outside the Christian art of prayer, had to overreach himself and do something terrible in order to make an impression on God. Recall to mind our Lord's words: " Speak not much as the heathen do, for they think that in their much speaking they may be heard." Do not take that material, mechanical view of prayer. No, prayer is a most wonderful art, so great an art that it is found truly only in Christianity, and even in Christianity we have to watch it carefully lest it become either the hypocrisy of the Pharisee or the mechanism of the heathen. " When you pray," our Lord says, and then He teaches us this supreme art in the " Our Father."

Now, prayer is simply based on the nature of God. The nature of God is, so to speak, the key to prayer. Your heavenly Father knows what you want before you ask Him. And yet it is a fact that He has made His gifts to a certain extent dependent on this condition, that we should pray. But our prayer, Christian prayer, is something very wonderful, so wonderful that it cannot be explained without the intervention of a new power, the Holy Ghost Himself; the Spirit of God must come into our hearts and help us to pray, because St. Paul tells us, we do not know how to pray nor what to pray for; but the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Love, asks for us according to the will of God, so that in prayer we enter more fully into the spirituality of God than in any other manner. Prayer is so spiritual that the Holy Ghost is Himself the prime mover in all our prayers. When we pray, be it the prayer of intercession or the prayer of praise or thanksgiving, we truly have our hearts on the Heart of God, we feel the breathings of God's will in our souls, and our hearts respond to the beatings of God's heart. Prayer is the touch of God in our souls. We cannot pray unless we are moved by God to pray, and even so, such is the wonderful nature of God, that we are not always sure of certain external circumstances

certain facts; we are not sure of the day or the year when certain things will be granted. No, when we pray we pray by divine motion, divine impulse. Take an instance. You pray for a certain temporal favour, and you would like this temporal favour to be granted to you at a definite time, and you pray fervently. When the time arrives, the favour which you have asked for, and for which you have, so to speak, fixed a date, is not granted—at least, the thing you wanted is not there, not visible. Does that mean that your prayer has not been a Christian prayer, a motion of the Holy Spirit in you, has not been a supernatural prayer? No, of course your prayer has been a supernatural act; but such is the nature of God that though He moves your heart with certainty, He does not always show to you with equal certainty the final results. But of one thing you may be absolutely sure, when you pray you are near to Him and He is near to you, that none of your prayers fall to the ground, that none are without fruit, none fail, however fruitless they may seem in a material sense.

Take our Lord's prayer in the Garden. Our Lord always acted with infinite truth, infinite reality, infinite conviction; and when He prayed: "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass

from me,"[1] He prayed a sincere prayer, He asked for something that was really possible. His prayer, too, proceeded from God, from His loving Father, and yet that prayer, in that specific form, was not granted, true prayer though it was. How can we avoid the reproach of contradiction, the imputation of collusion, when we admit such a possibility and yet speak of real prayer? The wisdom of God is our answer. God has infinite resources, He is in every way unlimited, He blesses all things, external circumstances are nothing to Him. Everything is an instrument in His hands, and if He does not grant your prayer in the practical meaning which you attach to it, He does grant it in a very real sense, not known to you.

This is Christian prayer, a wonderful art. There is a marvellous reserve in it; though so confident and so fervent, it leaves much to God. It never fails to make this reservation: "Not my will but thine be done." By this phrase our Lord does not mean that God will not grant His prayer, but that the Father will grant it in His own time and way. As a fact the Father granted His Son something exceedingly greater to compensate for the apparent refusal, and the

[1] St. Matt. xxvi 39.

prayer was answered in a higher, more eminent fashion.

When we pray—let us remember it always—we are dealing with God. Prayer has great characteristics, it is a wonderful art, the art of the children of God. The heathen cannot pray in so far as they are heathen, for prayer requires a motion of God far superior to anything of which man is capable in the natural order. We know that no prayer is fruitless, that prayer is always heard and answered. How often this has been borne out in your own experience! You had something very much at heart, something, perhaps, for the glory of God. You prayed that it might be granted by a certain feast day. The day came, but no apparent answer. Yet if you look back years later you will see that everything has been given to you for which you asked so earnestly, only granted in a different manner, in a much more beautiful way. Each one of us could bear witness to this. God deals with us like that. Sometimes He reveals to His saints the very time when He will accede to their request, but that is an unusual dispensation of His providence. The ordinary economy in the prayer of petition for material or temporal favours is this: we are allowed to pray fervently, and pray in the Holy Ghost;

but though we give our prayer an object, define it clearly, God reserves to Himself how He will deal with it in His own infinite wisdom, whether He will grant it specifically as we desire it or in other ways. God's resources are immense. After all, what is one thing or another? All things are alike to God. All He wishes for is our happiness, and that He bestows not in our way but in His own.

Your prayer, therefore, must be an act of great confidence in God, a great assimilation to the mind of God, a great trust in Him, not a mechanical, dictated petition to Him. You must not send your orders to God every morning as you do to your servants. It is said of the Englishman that he sends his orders first to the Almighty and afterwards to his household! That is the heathen way. Real prayer is a refined thing, a delicate thing, an art of the soul, placing itself like a child before its heavenly Father, not knowing all the divine Will, but knowing well His character, and when the prayer is not apparently answered, never on that account doubting, but holding implicit faith that it has been heard and will be granted in some better way.

This is Christian prayer; this is the spirit in which we are to pray. We are tempted some-

times to make our prayer too mechanical, as if we were putting a penny in the slot and something must come out at the other end. Christian prayer has a wonderful latitude, but it also has a very definite certainty; latitude in so much as it commits to God the manner of His response; certainty as to the fact of that response. Let us then pray, and pray in the spirit, but leave God to act and answer in His own way; that is His own secret.

This is entirely true in the spiritual order. It is not for you to know the times and moments which the Father has put in His power. He will never abandon you. If the thing has not come to you it is a sign that it is not needed; if it were needed it would have been given. But your prayer has a higher ending, more beautiful than anything you can imagine, more satisfactory, greater in glorious results than if your individual, narrow prayer had been accomplished on the day you asked. Let us take this generous, I might almost say, this liberal view of prayer. It is based on the character of God; He is a Spirit, and they that come to Him must adore Him in spirit and in truth.

There is nothing which sometimes is more difficult to answer than the query: how can we trust God when we have prayed so much and

not been heard? But remember this, your prayer has been heard, and has had its effect, only not *your* effect. The heavenly Father knows better, all things are in His hands. There is, so to speak, an infinite play of things in the hands of God. All the ends of the earth are in His palm, all the ends of time are present to Him. He sees what we cannot see. He has reserved to Himself to order things, and very rarely does He reveal to us the issues. The one thing He gives to us is the power to speak to Him, to work with Him, to love Him and to conform our desires to His; to bring things about as if we were His helpmates, His coadjutors—to use St. Paul's phrase. How far removed is this view of prayer from that of the heathen. Generosity and trust inform the Christian spirit, a spirit entirely opposed to the mechanical ideas of the heathen.

A young man came to me one day and said: "Father, I am doing well in business and I should like to marry a Catholic girl. How many Masses should be said to bring that about?" There is the heathen view of prayer. Pray and have Masses said by all means, and the right thing will be brought about, but do not seek to dictate.

The ways of God are so wonderful. It is,

indeed, a most incomprehensible privilege that we puny creatures should be allowed to pray, to enter into the power of God, to whisper our needs to the heart of God in heaven, confident, though so ignorant. And even if, like children's prayers, our prayer is a simple thing, it is not futile nor despised by God. Prayer is always mighty with God, and our Father who is so rich in mercy, so plentiful in wisdom, will give to our stumbling petition a reward far more beautiful than anything we can desire or deserve.

CHAPTER IX

APPRECIATION OF DIVINE THINGS

"O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet."—*Ps.* xxxiii 9.

IS it not a wonderful thought that even in the Old Testament, long before the great outpouring of His sweet mercy of Redemption, there should be this profession of God's sweetness? Everywhere the effects of this fundamental sweetness of God are visible to us.

Sometimes in life we come across men, strong men, whose career is difficult, whose work is arduous, who have to do stern, even harsh things, to punish the wicked, to act with rigour. And perhaps our first impression of such men is that they are hard. But that is because we take them only superficially, because we see them only through certain contingencies in their actions, in their external operations. But if we come into more personal contact with these men, if we are admitted to their friendship, we are immensely surprised, we find that these strong, stern men are really most sweet, gentle,

forbearing, humble, that their fundamental characteristic is sweetness.

This is a faint simile of our acquaintance with God. God does strong things, severe things, at times, and we might get the impression that He is a stern God. But this is not a right estimate of His character. We must get nearer to Him, we must study Him more closely; we must be admitted to His friendship, and then we find that the great Lord God, fundamentally, in His immensity of life, is infinite, unlimited sweetness; that His nature is sweet, and that the harsh things of His Providence are mere necessities to save His creation from corruption, mere external accidents that do not affect His intrinsic sweetness; that even in His stern dealings He is animated by an infinite sweetness of purpose, and that love for His children and desire for their happiness is His aim even then when He strikes His hardest blows.

So the character of God is sweetness, and we, His children, are to taste of it. It is through loyalty to Him that we penetrate, so to speak, through the externals, and are admitted into the secrets of His intimacy, and then we realise that He is infinitely sweet, that sweetness, not sternness, is His real character; that He is a most amiable Lord, who has all the attractive-

ness of a lover, all the beauty of a child, and all the tenderness of a mother. One who, by the very laws of His infinite sanctity, must be infinite joy, infinite gladness; one might almost say that He wears an infinite smile of eternal happiness. God is sweet, and all His ways and His thoughts are sweet; and if there is sternness, even anger, it is only provoked by those things which hide His sweetness. He is angry with His enemies because they poison the minds of His children. He has to safeguard and defend His own nature in stern actions; but in His purpose, in His own life He is sweet, and the fuller our faith in that sweetness of God the more true and loyal we shall be to Him.

It is very wrong of us to doubt this sweetness of God. Everywhere we have evidence of it. Its aroma is everywhere, even in the very wounds which He sometimes inflicts. While He strikes his hands are full of sweetness, and we feel in our very faults we are received into His arms, and find ourselves resting on the infinite sweetness of God.

CHAPTER X

DIVINE STANDARDS

WHEN the disciples came back one day to our Lord after having been separated from Him for a short interval, they were greatly elated over the success of their various missions. Our Lord had sent them out to preach, to make, so to speak, a first trial of their apostolate. He had sent them out without scrip or shoes or money, only in the strength of His own Spirit, and they came back to tell Him all they had achieved, all the wonders which they had been able to perform in His Name. But one thing above all others was pleasing to their memory, of one thing they were especially proud—that devils had been subject to them. That fact gave them a wonderful courage, they were immensely strengthened by the power they had proved themselves to have over the devil, that devil whom they had dreaded so much. He had been to them an object of perpetual fear, as he is to us, but now they found they could tread him under their feet, he could no longer hurt them. But our Lord received

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their report with this comment: " Rejoice not in this, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven."[1]

Here is one of the many instances in which our Lord endeavours to bring back His disciples to true values, to a true estimate of things, that is, one might say, to Christianity. The way in which Christianity looks at things is so very different from the estimate of the world. And so our Lord, by a comparison, makes it clear to His disciples that power, even spiritual power like that which they found themselves to have over the devil, is a small thing compared with the profound issues of our destiny, the more potent things of our faith. What is the thing that matters beyond all else, the thing that should give us utmost joy ? It is this: that our names are written in heaven; that we belong to heaven, that we are the children of the Father who is in heaven. Our Lord says He saw Satan like lightning falling from heaven. That mighty spirit, endowed no doubt with wonderful gifts, fell from his glorious destiny; and the disciples, humble and lowly as they were, had every chance of attaining to that heaven, their names were written in heaven. We may take it here

[1] St. Luke x 20.

that our Lord uttered that "Verily, verily" which the Catholic Church admits, when He said to the Twelve Apostles: "You, who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the seat of his majesty, you also shall sit on twelve seats judging the twelve tribes of Israel."[1] Anyhow the eleven Apostles were predestinated, their election was complete, all their names were surely written in heaven, whilst Lucifer, that proud spirit, lost his principality, and fell with all the glory of his intellect and power. If we do not take the more abstruse view, we can always say that the names of the disciples were written in heaven because every facility and every chance to go there was placed at their disposal.

But the great truth which is embodied in this anecdote of the sacred Gospel is this: our Lord bids His disciples to fix their gaze on the true values, on the things that really matter, on the things of eternal issue, of eternal meaning. So Christianity is truly a right valuation of things. We know values, and we discard much; we say of many things: this or that does not matter. The only thing that really matters is the final issue, predestination. Everything else, however beautiful and estimable, is only secon-

[1] St. Matt. xix 28.

dary. The primary thing is that our name should be written in heaven. We may not criticise God's mysteries, but of this we are certain as Catholics, that we have at our disposal all the means and facilities needful, that our names are written in the book of heaven, and if we do not go there our names will have to be effaced from the book. We are the children of the heavenly Father, and our names are among those who have life. We are not children of darkness, we are children of light, and therefore let us, in the words of St. Peter, make our calling and election sure. This we can do through perseverance in our Catholic life.

Let us always bear in mind this great truth, that nothing else really matters so long as we arrive at that great destiny which is prepared for us. But in practice the thing is much more difficult than would appear at first sight. We are all ready to admit in theory that nothing is worth having in comparison with eternal happiness; but when it comes to practice, when in the conduct of life we have to assign to things their due proportion, when a choice is before us, how often we confound the values, giving a lower place to the higher thing, and a high place to the lower. It requires a special genius not to be dazzled by appearances, not to be allured

by mere passing splendours, not to be overawed by anything except the eternal things of God, to realise that all else is merely a preparation, an exercise; the things that matter are the great issues of grace, the interests of eternity.

Now, to begin with, there are the valuations which have to do with material things. There you would admit quite readily in theory that material things do not count at all. We all recognise that clearly. "What gain or what profit is it to a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"[1] What are material things compared with things spiritual? Of what avail are all worldly advantages if they only put obstacles between us and our heavenly destiny? We have no misgivings on the point; we speak of it quite candidly—in fact, we could all preach sermons on it. So be it. But when we come to actual fact we find it very difficult to keep steadily before our eyes the futility of earthly things and the all-importance of things heavenly. In prosperity we easily make excuses, and in adversity we find it hard to be patient. No doubt we are all ready to make sacrifices when conscience comes into play and we say: This must be done or this must not be. But it is very easy to baffle one's conscience. This

[1] St. Matt. xvi 26.

was what happened in the sixteenth century here in England. Those who were rich and had power and lands saw that Catholicism was the true religion; but they stifled their consciences and warped their views. They became time-servers, hoping for better things after the death of the king, when his successor would bring back the true religion and they would become Catholics again. Playing thus with their consciences they lost the faith, the faith of England. They never meant to do so; very few intended to become Protestants; they temporised. It was not a direct act of apostasy, but a temporising, a parleying with conscience when there should have been a firm act of faith, a final refusal to do the evil thing. This was the crime, the lapse of the English nation in the sixteenth century. Some few stood out, perhaps your own forefathers among them. You are their children and their blood is in your veins, their life still lives in our old Catholic families. One of them, a Fitzgerald or a Fitzherbert, I cannot recall which, wrote a hymn, the Hymn of Conscience, which was much sung. For the sake of conscience he himself had given up his estate, his park with its herds of deer, his home, all the things which are life to an Englishman; and the man who came and took possession of

it all, whose conscience was not as straight and stern, no doubt prided himself that he was doing no wrong. The Church must have been very severe upon those people who by such temporising of conscience brought about the downfall of religion here in England. A terrible result of their hesitancy, that they had lost the power of clear valuation.

So in your life be very precise about spiritual values. If the thing is a spiritual thing it is infinitely above all else.

An Anglican Bishop not long ago commented in the newspapers on the Catholic doctrine that a man should be ready to suffer the loss of all his worldly possessions in order to avoid a venial sin. "What fanaticism" he says. "What . . ."

No! For the sake of conscience we must surrender everything. Venial sin is worse than all the sufferings here on earth; for the sake of conscience we must be ready to suffer much. These great principles are the principles of Christianity; they make it what it is, the art of true valuation. We admit this, but we must not stop at that; we must acquire the power of true valuation, true views in spiritual things. The Apostles were elated over their success, their power over evil spirits; a brilliant power,

a success which was very striking. They openly rejoiced in it. Perhaps they were not spiritual enough yet, not sufficiently refined to grasp the full meaning of our Lord's words: " Rejoice not in this, that the spirits are subject unto you: but rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven." That is to say: " Rejoice in the true, substantial and essential things of Christianity, of spirituality."

We in our days are inclined to think and dwell too much on what is merely phenomenal and accidental in our religion. We talk of visions, miracles, and stigmata, and I know not what. Now these things have a certain spiritual worth: they are, in a way, testimonies to the deeper things. But let us have a true understanding of spiritual issues, let us bear in mind that there is nothing greater, nothing more marvellous, nothing holier, than the doctrines which you might call the ultimate doctrines of Christianity. The doctrines of grace, of mercy, the doctrines of the sacraments, the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, of the angels, of prayer, of those basic, all-pervading truths which are to be found neither here nor there only—neither on Mount Carmel nor in Jerusalem only—but which are the possessions of Christianity all the world over, and the belief of Christians of all

times. In these things we are the brothers and sisters of the first Christians two thousand years ago; we are at one in these vaster issues. There are accidental things which are new—certain forms and rites, for instance. The great things are the things that are eternally great, and they are the ordinary things: that our names are written in heaven; that we have that wonderful incorporation in Christ; that we have the Holy Ghost; that we have Faith, Hope, and Charity, the three powers that supremely matter. Acts of faith, hope, and charity are the most spiritual things a man can do, more excellent than to raise one from the dead. "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. . . ."[1]

St. Paul had the gift of true valuation. He knew what ultimately mattered in the spiritual life and what was less important. The Corinthians were in danger of being side-tracked by spiritual things that were yet not essential. We might almost say by their very gifts of prophecy, of healing, of miracles, they thought themselves high in the favour of God. But St. Paul reminds them that though these external powers of the Church have a useful ministra-

[1] 1 Cor. xiii 1.

tion, the one thing that really matters is the practice of "faith, hope, and charity, these three, but the greatest of these is charity." Charity is really eternal life, for when we are in charity our names are truly written in heaven.

This is a great consideration. Very often you are unhappy in your spiritual life precisely through this very thing, that you lack true power of valuation; you attach too much importance to this or that and not enough to those things which are everlasting. It is as if, in the natural order, we preferred artificial light to the mighty sunlight that gives life to every creature on the earth. The sun, after all, is the one power that makes things possible. In a mysterious way even electricity comes from the power of the sun. The sun is the true light, and you must prefer nothing to the sun. It rises and sets and we pay no attention to it, we take it for granted; we do not appreciate the daily marvel of its rising and setting. We do not reflect on the power of that mighty globe, which is truly the source of life. If it is too hot we hide from it; and if it hides away we grumble. And so with regard to the great factors of our spiritual life. We are apt to pass them by, to forget their immense importance in our daily life. Faith, hope, charity, the Holy

Ghost, the Mass, the sacraments, all the silent powers that do not attract attention. Yet if a man in London has some mysterious gift, a doubtful force of healing, for instance, the Press is full of it, everyone hurries to go and see him. How strange, how naïve, while yet they pass by the greater things which God has given to us for our eternal life !

I always insist in my own sphere of life and action that we should read with utmost love and reverence about the common things of Christianity, the universal things. Mass is universal, it is celebrated from sunrise to sunset all over the world; Holy Communion, Confession, the sacraments, the ecclesiastical authority of the Holy Father, indulgences, the great jubilee of this year, devotion to the Apostles, who were the founders of the Church, to the Holy Angels —those mighty beings, our unseen helpers— all these things make up the Kingdom of Heaven; these will survive when we are gone, and because, in a way, they will outlast the more transient forces of the body, they are universal. Our Lord has a wonderful saying about this very matter. He says: "No man drinking old [wine], hath presently a mind to new: for he saith, The old is better," as if He knew perfectly well the differences in wines,

and if you read the passage[1] you will arrive at the conclusion that old wines are best. We may also say that old Christianity is best; the everlasting Christianity with its majestic forms, its broad outlines, its glorious simplicity. Now one of these great simple facts is that we are the children of God, that our names are written in heaven. It requires strength of mind and education not to be carried away by every new fanatical thing, wasting spirituality in small matters, not realising the glorious personal importance of this mighty truth, that your name is written in heaven because you have been incorporated in the mighty spiritual dispensation of Christianity.

[1] St. Luke v 39.

CHAPTER XI

DIVINE GUIDANCE

WE read in the Acts of the Apostles that when St. Paul and his fellow-labourers had travelled through certain countries they made up their minds to go further, and preach the Gospel in Asia—not the Continent so-called, but the Roman province of that name (which is now known as Asia Minor). Says the historian: "And when they had passed through Phrygia and the country of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia."[1]

This passage reveals something very deep in God's dealings with souls, something very striking in the way in which God carries out His plans. There was the great St. Paul, burning with zeal, a spiritual conqueror, so to speak. Like Alexander, there were not worlds enough for him to conquer. He was eager to spread the name of Christ everywhere, and just as he was on the threshold of a new country he was stopped by the Holy Ghost Himself, telling him

[1] Acts xvi 6.

not to go that way, that way was not for him. The Holy Ghost perhaps wanted missionaries over there, but had not that mission for Paul.

There is in God's dealings, both in nature and in grace, a clearness of plan which is truly part of our Christian view of God. We think of Him as having definite thoughts, definite schemes for His actions. He is the supreme Master, and may, in the profundity of His own divine counsels, do this or that as He chooses. Not every man is expected to do all things. Paul is not to preach in Asia; however holy a work that might be, it is forbidden to him. You might say: were there no souls there waiting for the Gospel? That is not the concern of the individual. The concern of the individual is to know what the Holy Ghost asks of him, and, whether it be in a higher or a lower plane, to do that thing with all his might. Our Lord Himself came with a very definite mission so far as His external activities were concerned; He was not sent to preach to the whole world, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, one special family of the human race; and that only for a definite time, He always speaks of His "hour." When the hour strikes He is ready, He works as His Father wishes Him to work and for as long a period and no longer. Re-

demption in the Sacrifice of the Cross is for the whole human race; but His direct missionary activity was for a specified and quite narrow circle.

It is an essentially Christian point of view to regard God's activities, with their freedom of choice, their foresight, almost as a kind of chess, now moving this piece, now taking that piece, according to the great scheme of mercy He has in His mind. This is the Christian view of God.

The heathen view of God is very different; the Christian ideal vanishes and there enters an idea of law, of fixity, of permanency, of fate. Things are unalterable, the laws of nature are inviolable, there is no real freedom of action in the world. The world is a fixed and unchanging quantity, and there is no power that can control its movements at any time. This is paganism, and it is old and yet ever new; it is the paganism of our own days, the great cry of all that terrible fallacy of so-called modern science—though it is not a question of science at all. It is a question of a certain mentality, and modern mentality is loth to admit that God has any power whatever to interfere with the laws of nature. Christianity, on the contrary, has always had the view that God plays with the mighty

things of nature; they are mere toys in His hands; even when they seem to be irrevocably fixed, their fixture is subject to the will of God. God is not the slave of the world which He has created. No, the world which He created is His own project, and He can do with it as He pleases. God can alter things, can interfere with things, but when He does so He still keeps all the laws which He Himself created.

There is a very important difference between these two views, the heathen and the Christian, important because it so profoundly affects your daily life and thinking. We must avoid the attitude of fatalism, as if God were not omnipotent: God can do everything. If He sometimes refuses to answer your prayer in the exact way for which you pray it is not because He cannot. It is because, for some hidden reason, He does not wish to do it. " Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee," says the Divine Child, the only Begotten Son, kneeling in His agony in the Garden. Yes, all things are possible unto Him. There is simply nothing that can withstand Him: " Everything is in Thy hands." Whatever God has made, He has made pliable, subservient to His will. This is the Christian spirit, and the more we enter into this spirit the more delighted are we with those

miracles which happen in the history of the people of God. For the more religious a nation is, the more intimate it is with God, and the more that nation believes in God's power to change things, to play with things. And remember that God, in that playfulness, never disturbs order; He has made it all, and it is all in His hands; it is all a part of His divine game, so to speak. He has made allowance for His own intervention in the order He has created.

And so, in our everyday life, we should consider all things as being in the hands of God. What a difficult truth to grasp at certain periods of our life! Perhaps when we were children we found it easier. I was listening the other day to a catechism class, and a dear child, full of the grace of Baptism, was being taught the history of the martyrdom of St. Paul. The catechist told the children that St. Paul had his head cut off for the love of Christ, and one little fellow at once said: " Then God has given him another head to go to heaven with." We ought to agree entirely with the words of that child. If the persecutor cuts off St. Paul's head, God can give him another. God can give heads or souls or anything else. This should be our simple faith all the years of our life. This is how we ought to pray. This is how the

generations of Christians in the great past felt and spoke, and it is only modern paganism, with its fixity, permanency and fatalism, which has destroyed that simple faith, the inheritance of all Christians. All through the Middle Ages you have that faith in God's infinite possibilities, in that infinite playfulness of God. How can we explain those periods of history in which miracles were almost natural things? The more we study them, the more we are forced to admit that those people had the true concept of God; they understood His character better than we do; they knew perfectly well that He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, that His laws are holy beyond all things; and yet that He is a God of freedom, who is not restricted by anything, the free disposer of all creation, who can change and direct all things at His will.

So let us believe in God's perfect, absolute, daily control of the events of our lives. It is a difficult matter to accept if we are not religiously minded, if we have become sophisticated with doubt. Then we just submit to God; we fear Him in a way, but we cannot believe in Him as the infinitely free, liberal, joyful—we might almost say, smiling and playful God, who does things without number just to make His children

happy. God plays with us in very many ways, sometimes He urges us on, sometimes He checks us. There is no doubt an immense Providence of God constantly round about us. He often stops me from doing things I want to do. Not that I say He speaks to me by the Holy Ghost, but I feel I am stopped. I am not allowed to go that way or undertake such a thing; I am meant to go on with my duty, the duty which God has given me to do. So you, too, are prevented from doing many things, and perhaps sometimes you are very downcast, much discouraged, because you are not permitted to carry out some pet plan of yours which you think would be the making of you or someone else. What do you know of the difficulties you might have had to encounter? What can you foresee of the entanglements in which you might have found yourself before long? See what happens on a farm. A woman tries to bring home a refractory hen; this way and that it hurries, a silly, stupid bird. The woman runs, now in front and now behind it, now drives it along a wall, now against a railing, bars the way in every direction; and all the while the bird, I suppose fancying that it is doing its own will, is very angry at not being able to carry out its flight. What is the object of all this pursuit,

these unexpected checks? Simply that the truant should go into its own proper place, into the hen-house which is its home.

It is a very humble analogy, but this is often how God makes us walk with Him. We are very silly birds, and we want to have our own way, and He must drive us into the work where He wants us, and then He leaves us there and we are able to do much good. If we were not in that work it would weaken our force, He would not be able to show all the power that is in us, though we imagine that in another sphere we should shine more brilliantly. We are only sure of our moments; He checks us all the time. We see in this that profound providence which keeps us from evil, from selfishness, from doing the wrong thing, and finally helps us to do the work He requires from us. You all have some work to do. Do not imagine for a moment that work for God means only the higher activities of the Church. No, take a vast, liberal view of everything. The miner in digging for coal, the labourer in ploughing the fields, are both doing the work of God, are accomplishing the task set to them by God. Read your Scriptures. God speaks of all these activities and arts of man as being His own invention, His own doing. To one man He

gives talents for this, to another for that. To one He gives genius for mental work, to another for manual. Take all human activities as the works of God. God meant these things to be done. He made the spiritual and the material universe. Do your duty as mothers, as daughters, or whatever your mission in life; do it, and do not ask for anything else. Sometimes we have very wrong notions about our missions, as if they were something extremely spiritual. Nothing of the kind. Your mission is a natural one which is entirely in the hands of God. He must preserve the material universe as He preserves the spiritual one; and He gives grace, light, and strength for the preservation of the ordinary work of society as He gives light and strength for the preservation of His holy Church. Both parts, physical and spiritual, are the things of God; He does them according to His own sweet will. If you have that view of God, that rich—shall I say—that elastic and poetical view of God, things will be easier in life, for you will know that God is everywhere. God listens to the cry of the young raven in its nest as much as to the prayer of the great solitary in his hermitage.

If we but knew the character of God! What is God? Who is God? He is the Almighty,

the All-powerful. Nothing is estranged from him, nothing is hidden; without Him nothing can exist. He gives breath to the lowest form of life as well as to the highest spirit. God is an immense power; God has an immense life; God is all activity. He is free, untrammelled by His own laws, bound only by His own sanctity. He can exalt and He can humble; He can bestow grace and He can withhold it. In a moment He could make the greatest sinner into a holy man; and who can gainsay Him? In a moment, too, He can humble the saint if he fails in obedience. God is just in all His ways. What a glorious thing! What a great Christian ideal! In this lies the difference between us and the heathen. Our view of God is wholly unlike theirs. Their God is a God of slavery. Our God is a God who does things with utmost solicitude yet with perfect liberty; their God is subject to blind fate and force which nothing can control.

And so we find it easy to see our life in the hand of God, to see all our activities watched over by God, our efforts encouraged by God, our excesses rebuked by God. God wants you to do great things. He Himself does everything in number, measure, and harmony. He wants you, for instance, to do certain work for a

definite time; before that time is ended you cannot escape from that work. It is not an indefinite drudgery to which there is no end, though it may seem so to you. No, it is only a thing of a few years, perhaps, or a few months. For that time you have to nurse a sick father or mother; and although it may be a very heavy burden, woe to you if you shirk or neglect it. God wants you to carry that burden. If you have done it for the years He has appointed you have done His work. After that things may be easier. He does not put on you the same burden twice, perhaps because you could not stand it. To some other people He has given even heavier burdens because He knows that they are capable of bearing them. He varies the burdens according to your power to bear them, but at no time does He lay on you more than you can bear. All is possible if only you can grasp the Christian view of God and make it your own, the view I have been insisting on, that God is a God of infinite power, from whom nothing is hidden, and from whom everything receives its existence, that God is infinitely free, disposing of all things as He wills and ordering every detail of your life, appointing what you are to do and what you are to leave undone.

XII

DIVINE METHODS

IT is the constant teaching of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church that God could have redeemed mankind in many ways. Who can set limits to the possibilities of the divine Mind, to the resources of the divine Will? All things are possible to God. Yet God has chosen one very special kind of Redemption, and that is the Redemption with which we are familiar, under which we live, the Redemption which has a perfectly definite character, about which we can know much. We can start with clear assumptions, and arrive at clear conclusions. This Redemption, the actual Redemption, may be called the Redemption of Incorporation, and if you will follow me carefully you will see what I mean by that term, and it will help you to understand your spiritual religion.

How are we redeemed? We are redeemed thus: we are incorporated in One who is infinitely holy, in One who is infinitely pure, and whose holiness, whose justice, whose purity

become ours, because we are His. In the words of St. Paul: " We are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones."[1] He is our Brother, He is of our family, He is of our nature, He is the new Adam, from whom we are descended spiritually as truly and as directly as we are descended, in a bodily meaning, from the first-born of the human race, the first Adam. Our sanctity, what is it ? Is it any kind of sanctity, any kind of goodness ? No, it is a definite sanctity, a definite goodness. Our sanctity is this: that we participate more and more in His life, that we are more and more His. How is this incorporation brought about ? In many ways. All the graces of the sacraments are ours which bring about that incorporation and carry it to perfection. The Holy Ghost proceeds from Christ, and gives us the very nature of Christ and draws us all into Christ. Christ is twofold, in His own personal nature and in His mystical nature; the true Body of Christ and His mystical body.

What is the power of that great sacrifice of Christ ? As St. Thomas Aquinas puts it so well: Christ the Son of God became one with man; He is in the very centre of the human race; and God, seeing in that Man, Christ, so much

[1] Ephes. v 30.

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holiness, so much sanctity, forgave everything to man, as man had become so beautiful, being God Himself.[1]

We can never exaggerate that contact between the human race and Christ. Christ was the greatest human being. Christ is man more than any other man. Christ in His own person sums up all the history of the human race; Christ is man, He is *the* man, *par excellence*. All other men put together have not the perfection of the manhood of Christ. All human history put together is a small thing compared with the history of Christ; for Christ is not only man but God. In Him God is man, and human nature has been raised to Hypostatic Union; whatever that Man does is the glory of the whole human race, and we are being more and more incorporated in Him who is the centre of mankind. There He stands in the middle, the meeting-point of all nations and all times; and those who enter into Him find life; those who refuse to enter are in death, because they refuse to enter into life, because they do not believe in the Son of God, in truth, in life. A vast number of men may not know, or may deny that fact, but it is the one fact that will stand out conspicuously on the last day when all things will be seen in

[1] P. III, Q. xlix, Art. 4.

their true light, that Christ, the Son of God, was the *nec plus ultra* of humanity, the perfection of the human race, and that no other men were like unto Him, they were mere outcasts of humanity compared to Him—were not men at all, they had never attained to humanity as they ought to have done. Manhood is found in perfection only in Christ, and we are incorporated in Christ. Now you see the profundity of this idea of incorporation, how it reaches out into all directions and leaves nothing untouched. God, who could have redeemed us in many ways, having infinite resources, redeemed us in one special way, a very clear way, incorporating man in the God-Man. And so if you are in Christ nothing evil can befall you. So to speak, you borrow from Him the solidity of His own state, you find in Him His hope, His charity, His grace. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ; how could there be? It would mean that Christ could be condemned, and such a thought is not possible. This is the Redemption in which the Church believes, a most sweet Redemption, in truth a masterstroke of genius; a Redemption which the world could never conceive.

People talk of the Redemption; Protestants may speak of our Redeemer, our Saviour, but

they have a very vague idea of Redemption. Those ideas are not sufficient, they are not Catholic, not Christ's traditional Christianity. One idea is essential, incorporation in Christ. Starting with that we can speak in a Christian way, we can use intelligently the phrases and formulas which come from God Himself and which express the whole truth of Christianity.

We who are Christ's have put on Christ as a spiritual garment; God sees only Christ in us. Christ has taken into Himself the whole human race. It is only through infidelity that we are separated from Him. But if we have faith we are His and His life flows through our veins, His grace is in our souls, His resurrection is our resurrection. This profound idea St. Paul inculcates over and over again. The fate of mankind is the fate of Christ; what happens to Christ happens to mankind. Christ rose from the dead, therefore man rises from the dead; if Christ has not risen, your faith is vain, for you are yet in your sins. If Christ ascends into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God, the whole human race is free to sit at the right hand of God in Christ. Christ is filled with the Spirit of God, and that Spirit is also the spirit of the man who is in Christ. When Christ comes at the end of time, all we in Christ appear with

Him because of our incorporation, without any stint or restriction; we are incorporated in Him with the full measure of our persons, soul and body. Your bodily life is known to Christ, and this will be shown in a most wonderful manner on the day of the final resurrection, because our body rises in Christ. This is what is meant by our redemption.

Thus we see how all these things fit in; how in our Christian dispensation there is no interruption; it all flows as one mighty stream of grace and light, incorporation being the law of Redemption, the Redemption which God Himself has planned for us. We need not be surprised, therefore, at anything that is part of that plan, however marvellous; we need not be surprised even at the wonderful gift of the Blessed Eucharist, for the Blessed Eucharist is merely an instrument of that incorporation whereby we are made one with Christ, flesh of His Flesh and bone of His Bone. Is it a marvel, then, that the Son of God should give you His Flesh to eat and His Blood to drink? It all follows in perfect sequence. We are redeemed in the death of Christ; we die with Him and we rise with Him. Is it astonishing, then, that we should be fed in life in a most excellent way, that also we should celebrate

His death in the very elements of His death, His Body and His Blood ? In that death we all were born and it is still with us. We are so closely incorporated with Him, we are so much part of His life, His history, that whatever He did must be given to us in reality, that we have actually the mystery of His death on our Altars each morning, and we enter into that death, that sacrifice. We sit at the table of the Lord, and we eat His Flesh and drink His Blood, because if we did not eat that Flesh and drink that Blood our incorporation would be less complete. Whatever we do is a matter of incorporation. When you receive absolution you are incorporated in Christ's Blood. When two Christians are united in matrimony, they are incorporated into Christ's lordship over life and death. In a true way they enter into Christ's paternity, because He is the Father of the human race and the world to come. And when you die, Christ incorporates you into Himself, anointing you with the holy oil of His Spirit. So thus we are never outside Christ; our life is not isolated from Him even in death. We do not loiter outside the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem as strangers and foreigners; we are fellow-citizens with the saints in heaven, and Christ Himself is the chief Cornerstone, the

whole edifice rests and is built up on Him, and from Him receives its solidity and its character.

This is the Redemption in which we believe and which we possess. It changes the whole aspect of Christianity when once that fact is firmly grasped. To be in Christ, *in Christo*. St. Paul uses the expression, and it is not an hyperbole or distortion of the truth. It expresses a great reality, that you and I, all of us at this moment, because we are sure of our faith in Christ, and that we are in Christ and under His direct influence, as the Holy Council of Trent puts it, are actually in Christ. Christ, when once He has cleansed a soul in baptism, is there constantly, unceasingly pouring His own life into that soul, spontaneously as if Christ were the fountain-head, and His members receive the flow of His Blood as it comes from His sacred Heart, so direct is the contact. All the graces you receive come directly from Christ, because you have Christ with you. If you fall, Christ raises you up, and sends you a new grace of repentance, encouraging you with the words: "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Christ has two histories, the history of His own Person in the three and thirty years of His earthly life, and the history of His Church.

What is the history of His life in the Church? We do not know. It began in time and will end when Christ comes to judge the living and the dead. Christ is Master and Lord, without Him there is no true humanity. Man is not perfectly man unless he be in Christ; he is only a kind of counterfeit man, imperfect, unfinished, when he is not in Christ. True manhood does not exist outside Christ. What was man? What is man? In order to know what man really is we ought to have known our Lord in His mortal life, or we ought to have seen Adam in the days of his innocence. Then we should know what man is. Since then there has been no man; the perfect man has not existed. There are only two Adams, the first and the second. But the more we approach Christ, the more perfect is our humanity; the further we recede, the lower is our humanity. Man becomes a savage, a brute, as he loses touch with Christ, the greater the distance the more visible the deterioration; but on the other hand, the closer the contact, the higher the manhood. Let us not be under any delusion; we live, it is true, in the midst of a great civilisation, but all that is truly great in it comes from Christ. Had we seen the heathen, the pagan man in the periods that preceded Christ, we should have been shocked at the

hideous degradation of thought and manners. It is only Christ that can make man a true man; on Him all our manhood depends. The greatest saint is the most perfect man, because in him Christ is most clearly manifested, and if there is one thing which St. Paul drives home to us with a strength that is truly supernatural it is this: that as there was one man who was the cause of death, so there is another who is the cause of life, and that Man is Christ Jesus, in whom we all are incorporated.

XIII

DIVINE POSSESSION

" All that the Father giveth to me shall come to me."—*St. John* vi 37.

IN these words we have epitomised the doctrine which I propounded to you in our last meditation, that our Redemption, the whole mystery of God's mercy to us, is this: that we are given to Christ; that all those whom God has predestinated to glory shall, sooner or later, come to Him. Our Lord uses the beautiful words: " All that the Father giveth to me shall come to me." The profoundest of truths, this is a revelation to us of the inner working of God's Providence; He pushes everything forward, so to speak, to Christ. All things meet in Him. " All that the Father giveth to me shall come to me."

Now there are two great actors in this wonderful drama: the Father urging things forward to His Son, and the Son — how does He behave? He says: " He that cometh to me I will not cast out." Our Lord will never cast anyone away. He speaks as if He were in a

house where souls have their being, where they abide, and He will not turn anybody out of His own accord; they were given to Him, and He will keep them, He will bear with them, will find more room in His heart for them. He will expand His powerful nature so that none of them need be outside Him. He deals with us, He does not cast us out. Why? Because He came down from heaven to do the will of the Father who sent Him. This is His mighty obedience, this is His great mission, to receive unto Himself all whom the Father hath given Him. He will not cast out one. We come to Him in our sins, He does not cast us out. We come to Him as beggars to a shelter, He does not reject us. No, not He. He has promised His Father so. "I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me." He will not cast us out for anything that we do except that ultimate, evil thing, apostasy. He keeps us even in our sins, our mortal sins, as long as we remain true to the faith of Christ. Final separation only takes place when a man loses his faith in Christ and in the Redemption that Christ has brought.

Here you have the glorious, divine summary of that supreme mystery of the Redemption of Christ: to be in Christ. You have that assur-

ance, consoling beyond all assurances, that He will not cast you out. If we could but see how our Lord carries the souls of men, carries them in spite of themselves! It is told of St. Gertrude that once our Lord appeared to her as one very tired, and asked her to support His arms, because, He said, He had too much to carry, and what He carried was so difficult to hold. This was, of course, a mystical way of asking for her prayers, as He constantly asks the prayers of all of us. This is only one instance of the mighty working of His power. The Christian Church has kept this idea all down the centuries; in the catacombs or on old publications you will see the fish (which is the emblem of Christ) carrying on its back a basket of bread, by which is meant the assembly of the faithful. Christ carries the whole human race on His shoulders, so to speak. On Him is laid the iniquity of us all.

Moses, to whom God had entrusted His people, seeing a great multitude, for which he was responsible, and which caused him so much bitterness of soul, said to the Lord: "Why hast thou afflicted thy servant? Wherefore do I not find favour before thee? And why hast thou laid the weight of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this multitude, or begotten them,

that thou shouldst say to me: Carry them in thy bosom, as the nurse is wont to carry the little infant: and bear them into the land, for which thou hast sworn to their fathers?"[1] He was tired of them, and wanted to get rid of them, as much as to say: "I am not their father or their mother. Why should I be bothered with this mighty multitude of rebellious people?"

But Christ is not like that; He will never pray to His Father such a prayer. He is infinitely strong and patient; He will not cast out anyone; He will not complain of any of us; He is our Father and our Mother; He has given His life for each one of us, and is responsible for us. This is the great mystery of the Redemption, our incorporation in Christ, that we come to Christ and He will not cast us out.

[1] Num. xi 11, 12.

XIV

SPIRITUAL CHILDHOOD

VERY often the Apostles asked our Lord questions concerning the hidden things of eternity, the great things of God's providence, and as a rule our Lord did not give them direct answers. They asked Him whether many shall be saved—a question we all ask at times. Our Lord's answer was an evasion: "Strive to enter by the narrow gate."[1] As much as to say, whether there be many or few is no concern of yours, but He gave no real answer. Again the Apostles asked Him if in those days the kingdom of Israel would be re-established, and He replied: "It is not for you to know the times or moments which the Father hath put in his own power."[2] No answer! They asked Him the hour and time of the end of the world. What was the reply? "Of that day or hour no man knoweth, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father."[3]

[1] St. Luke xiii 24. [2] Acts i 7.

[3] St. Mark xiii 32.

Now one day there was put to Him perhaps a more personal question. St. Matthew tells us that the disciples came and asked Him: "Who thinkest thou is the greater in the kingdom of heaven?" This also is a question which we sometimes ask ourselves, but to this question our Lord gives a very direct and very telling answer. "And Jesus, calling unto him a little child, set him in the midst of them, and said: Amen I say unto you, unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."[1]

This is the answer. A mighty revelation, indeed, of the ways of God, of the spirit of the kingdom of heaven. How our Lord insists in season and out of season, on that great thing, and He always brings in the child. Unless you receive the kingdom of heaven as children you cannot enter into it. Another time our Lord said: "I confess to thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent and has revealed them to the little ones."[2]

If there is anything clear in the sacred Gospels it is this necessity of spiritual childhood, without which we cannot begin anything, "without which you cannot enter," says our Lord

[1] St. Matt. xviii 1. [2] St. Luke x 21.

emphatically. You cannot. Do not think you can creep in by the back door, or that you can be received on your own terms. You cannot enter. On another occasion, when children were brought to Him by their mothers for His blessing, He said: "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these, and our Lord does not consider this childhood as a thing that is natural to us. He says two things: "Unless you be converted and become like little children." You see what a change has to take place: from manhood, as it were, to childhood; from one state of mind into another. You must be converted, and our Lord's idea of conversion is childhood, is simplicity.

Now what are we to understand by that wonderful thing, spiritual childhood, the one attitude which makes the kingdom of heaven possible? The Gospels insist much on the simplicity which is a necessary qualification of all who would enter the kingdom, but people seem to have confused the idea, and seek to regard the kingdom of heaven as something simple, instead of accepting simplicity as a characteristic of its children. To this our Lord's teaching is quite contrary. He says that the kingdom of heaven is a great thing, a thing

so mysterious and wonderful that no one can receive it unless he has the mind of a child; it is by no means simple, it is the glory of God and the wisdom of God. You cannot reduce the kingdom of heaven to anything simple any more than you can reduce nature to anything simple. Nature is infinitely profound, composed of a multitude and a variety of forces which baffle man more and more completely as he sees further into their depths. You must not transfer the simplicity which our Lord postulates from the child to the kingdom of heaven. No. The kingdom is a marvellous thing. The simplicity must be in our minds and in our eyes. We are confronted by a mighty thing; we meet it; it is offered to us; it comes to us as a thing of incomprehensible greatness, of wonderful power, a mystery which at first sight we cannot understand. How, then, can we receive it? How can we understand it? There is only one way—we must be converted and become as little children. Our minds must be pure and unsophisticated and natural. We must be converted and get rid of all those accretions which come to us from false training, from false traditions and standards, rid of all that hardness of heart which is the natural condition of the human race. We must become cheerful,

ready to receive things much greater than ourselves. We must have the wonderful gift of loving goodness. We must, in one word, be capable of admiration. We must feel elation when we see something that is perfect instead of taking it to pieces and criticising it, looking at it in a grudging and ungenerous way. Instead of that, let us be like children clapping their hands and giving vent to their joy in shouts and laughter; they have no reserves, no critical attitude, they have not been embittered yet; their hearts have not been soured; they have still the first, natural faith in goodness and then, through baptism, they have the supernatural faith in it, they admire it, unless, of course, they belong to that pitiable class of little ones who have no real childhood. But the ordinary happy child, who has the privilege of a good mother, has the gift of admiration, and keeps it till the blight of society falls on his mind and darkens it.

This, then, ought to be our great Christian mentality; a readiness to admire the things of God, a readiness to admit that He does great and marvellous things, that He is great in nature, great in heaven, great in grace, that He is the Creator of earth and heaven; that, in the words of our Blessed Lord, Heaven is God's throne and earth His footstool; that

there is nothing in the vast universe which is not the handiwork of God, and that therefore it is full of endless glories, possibilities and marvels. We have but one thing to do—a very easy thing at first sight—just to admire it, to love it for its beauty and riches, to clap our hands in our surprise at its glories and its mysteries. This is part of the great natural goodness of creation which we accept everywhere, and we should just admire, as children admire.

Now this is a very precious attitude, and it is the only attitude possible for entrance into the kingdom of heaven; without it you cannot enter in; but if you have it, you become great in that kingdom, because you have the true gift, the gift of nature and the gift of grace, of loving what is good and of rejoicing in the marvels, first of nature and then of grace, of realising that the Lord God Almighty does all things with wisdom and justice and sanctity, even when we do not understand all His ways. The critical attitude is most unchristian; it is the one attitude from which we must be converted. The attitude of divine childhood is sanctity, it is the power of the Church. Modern education is exactly the opposite to the spiritual childhood of Christianity. A more complete and fallacious opposition to the spirit of childhood than modern

education could not have been invented. I speak of modern state education; I do not refer to Catholic education, though this also suffers from it. But modern education is sheer paganism, where everything is done to distort the minds of children into those of young men and women before their time; to give them from the very first a tendency to the attitude of criticism, belittling great things such as the spirit of worship, of admiration. We have almost lost the spirit of adoration of Christ, it has gone away from us. It is bad manners nowadays to show enthusiasm about anything. Our very children are filled with that idea before they have reached the age of eleven; they pose in foolish ways, pretending that they admire nothing, that they are so blasé that they have lost the gift of simplicity.

In spiritual things the whole modern attitude is one of criticism. The greatest things we have on earth are the Scriptures, but they are no longer studied for their own sake, for their beauty and their purity, but for purposes of criticism and destruction. Every text is subjected to merciless criticism. Criticism would be good if it led to appreciation and admiration. But this is not so. The whole attitude of these "higher critics," as they are pleased to style themselves, is one of hostility; instead of gazing

at the mighty revelations of God and filling their minds with the joys of that vision, they analyse themselves, their own ideas and motives and actions. It is a morbid attitude, the outcome of an unhealthy state of psychology, and our whole modern spirituality is endangered by it, for men are drifting farther away from that simplicity which is truly the spirit of Christ.

Do we not think of our blessed Lord as the Child of God, as He is called so often in the Scriptures, the real Son of God, whose great object it is to admire His heavenly Father: "I confess to thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to little ones"? What profound admiration He showed for His Father, what deep reverence for the wisdom of the Father, though He Himself, in His divine Nature, was the Father's equal! What obedience! "I came not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me."![1] Knowing what a glorious thing the kingdom of heaven is, He trembles at the beauty of the things which the Father has prepared for those that love Him. "The world has not known thee," He says, as if to express the infinite glory of the Father which He alone

[1] St. John vi 38.

could appreciate. Such was Christ. Such, too, is the great spirit of Christianity. If we have not that spirit, the simple spirit of admiration, our Christianity is not a genuine Christianity, no matter how ascetic the life we lead. We must know our own souls and purify them; in a word, we must walk before God in sanctity and justice, and cleanse our hearts from all stain, but we must not make ourselves the centre of our lives, nor concentrate ourselves wholly on our own interests and vocation. There is only one end for man, and that end is not to be found within himself. Man's end, man's purpose is God, something outside himself which is greater than himself. It would be false Christian spirituality to say that the end of man is his own perfection. That is not the end of man. Man's perfection is not in himself, nor can it ever be in himself. Man's perfection is in God, in incorporation in Christ, and, through Christ, in God. All your virtues and all your piety, so to speak, would remain unfinished and incomplete if you were not raised above yourself to God. And this is the spirit of childhood, an unreserved admiration of God, an unstinted praise of God, a constant movement towards God, rising above yourself, outside yourself, so that your life is merged

in the greater life of God. When once you possess this spirit, when once you feel that God and the kingdom of heaven are infinitely greater than anything you can understand, then you love that incomprehensibility of God, you love to have His mysteries to admire. No longer do you question why He does this or that. On the contrary, you say, with Isaiah the prophet: " Verily thou art a hidden God, the God of Israel the Saviour."[1] God is obscure, full of mysteries, yet full of sweetness. When once you have penetrated into Him you will understand Him to have great and marvellous ways, mysterious dealings with His creatures; you take it for granted *a priori* that whatever He does is just and holy, and you will avoid the spirit of enquiry that asks: " Why this, why not that ?"

This, then, is the spirit of childhood, and our Lord says that unless you have it you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. It is very easy to become great in the kingdom of heaven, our Lord has made it so. When the Apostles asked Him who was the greater in the kingdom of heaven our Lord answered that " he is the greater who humbles himself like this little child." There is no getting away from that. Heaven will have startling revelations. People

[1] Isa. xlv 15.

will be great and mighty, children of sanctity, simply because they had that spirit of childhood which certainly is to be found in the Church of God all over the world. Our Catholic people still have the gift of admiration, they still bow before God and love His mysteries, they rejoice to enter into the splendours of God; they are at home there as a child is at home in a magnificent palace, but a palace infinitely greater, built before the child was born and outlasting all the other things that are on earth. True, simple souls live in that palace of God, and pass from glory to glory even unto the vision of God Himself.

Today we keep the Feast of St. Teresa, the great Carmelite. St. Teresa, perhaps, more justly than any other saint, could be summed up in those words of our Lord. She is indeed great in the kingdom of heaven: one of the great ones, because in her that wonderful atmosphere of childhood is so strikingly evident. What a simple soul St. Teresa was! How her whole life breathes that admiration for the mysteries of God! She pours out her whole heart, the heart of a child. People who do not understand Catholicism, who do not know spiritual things, have made a study of her, tried to analyse her, to classify her, to reduce her to psychological formulas; they have read into her life all sorts

of theories. There is nothing of the kind in St. Teresa. She is a most simple soul, just a good child growing up in the midst of the marvels of God, full of cheerfulness, of good humour, of simple tastes, admiring everything heavenly and earthly, finding an immense field in goodness. There is very little of self-analysis in her. She simply goes forward and forward, admiring more and more the goodness of God. Her soul is like the soul of the prophets of old, who sang the praises of the Lord just as He inspired them.

Here is the true Catholic mentality, the heroic mentality that does all the great works in the Church of God; the more critical mentality, even when brought into play by Catholics, is not effective to any great extent. The great work is done by the children of God, the heroes, the born artists of God. You know that an artist is born; you cannot make a great artist by theory. You may pass him through a school, you may teach him technique. That is mere craftsmanship; true genius is inborn. So likewise in the Kingdom of God we have that great gift of seeing the things of God clearly, divine instinct, as the pure and the humble have it, as children have it; and we simply know that God is so great, so powerful, so wonderful, that He cannot be adored but in one way, by admiration.

XV

SPIRITUAL CONFIDENCE

IF there is a feeling which gives us more satisfaction than any other it is the sense of security. We feel sure about a thing, and we are at ease, we are no longer troubled. We feel that our existence, our fortune, our life rests on a solid basis, and we enjoy that security. Much of the world's mind can be explained by a psychology based on this desire of the human mind for security. A man works hard, puts forth all his strength. Why? Is it because he actually enjoys his industry and wishes to profit by the fruits of his labour? No, he probably enjoys very little on the whole, but he wants to create for himself a sense of security, a feeling of safety. He wants to be at ease for the future, for himself, and for his family. He would like to die secure, leaving behind him a well-established business. He sometimes likes, in imagination, to read the column in the newspaper which will narrate his death, perhaps even quote the terms of his will. It pleases him to think that he will be worth thousands of

pounds when he dies. Already that thought gives him gratification.

I was talking the other day with a man who is well acquainted with France and the French peasantry, and he said that in his opinion the whole mentality of the French peasant from north to south is this: to establish himself and his children in security. He seeks independence; he wants to be safe from contingencies, from emergencies. He will economise, working from morning till night on his land, amassing money, not because he enjoys it—he enjoys very little, as a matter of fact—but because he desires, above all else, this sense of security.

But is there such a thing given to us as security? Does God want us to have security? Yes, yes! in one sense, but most emphatically No! in another. He does not want us to have security in anything else whatever outside Himself. In Himself we may have security as a bedrock, but He does not wish any of His creatures to have security in anything but Himself. As a matter of fact, it may be questioned whether it is at all possible that the creature could have security in himself. I do not think God could create any spirit, however exalted, who would have security in himself; who, so to speak, through his own nature, his own

gifts, would be beyond all danger of a fall or of imperfection: such a creature is not possible. Nothing that is finite can be secure. Whatever is finite has in itself a gap through which the gifts of the most highly endowed creature could escape. God alone is our Rock. All through the Psalms we read: "The Lord is my strength," "The Lord is my foundation," and if this is true in spiritual things it is also true in temporal things. God hates a man who puts his confidence in the army of men and makes flesh his security; there is actually a malediction for him who seeks to establish security in anyone other than God Himself.

In the spiritual order you must not be deceived. What is the reason of your certainty? Why do you hope for eternal life? Is it your own personal sanctity, or your own merits that inspire you with the confidence that you will go to heaven? Indeed no. If you had the merits of St. Paul those merits could not give you security. You may still fail; "there's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip" even in the spiritual order. No past merit of ours, no works of ours give us any reason for confidence. The reason of our confidence is entirely outside ourselves. God's goodness, God's kindness, that is our plea of hope, the theological plea of

hope. You hope because you trust God. In your prayer you appeal to God, not on account of the good things you have done, but on account of His mercies, that He should look upon you in spite of your iniquity. Sometimes, if you are not careful, you may be deceived by certain worldly things, certain phrases in some spiritual books that are not always written with the care that should be bestowed on them, deceived into thinking that it is possible for you to arrive at a state of conscience when you are absolutely sure of yourself, and can look God in the face and say: " Here I am; I am perfect; nothing can happen to me; I am a work of art, and You ought to be satisfied with me." Of course, no such sentiments should enter into the heart of any Christian. Whatever your virtue may be in the scale of perfection, the perfection is always incomplete, and whatever you may be, whatever past merits may be yours, those merits are the gift of God to you. The perfect gift is the gift of final perseverance; if you persevere to the end, that perseverance is God's last, best gift to you.

In the spiritual order we cannot have security, and Almighty God does many things to disturb false security. He leads us into temptation in order that we should feel how much we depend

on Him. Paul, the great Apostle, knew the sting of the flesh, and he felt humbled that he to whom had been shown such glorious visions should still be a victim to temptation, and he asked the Lord to remove this temptation; he tells us the reply he received: "My grace is sufficient for thee." One might almost say that St. Paul was inclined to find in himself his own security, but Christ said: "Thy security is only in me. My grace is sufficient for thee." Hold the hand of Christ and you are safe. In nothing that lies in you is your security. All your security is in God; all your confidence is through God.

If in the normal workings of divine Grace those who are saved are those who have been full of God continually for many years—for the workings of God are harmonious, and those that have done much will have the greater reward in heaven—yet there is always one principle we must not forget, that God is perfectly free to give the grace of repentance to a man at the last moment, and none may say: "Why should such a man have that grace?" Even you, with years of fidelity in the service of Christ, have been at God's mercy at all times, and in the last moment you will depend entirely on that mercy. And if God shows His mercy to one who has

not worked so hard in the past, thank Him, and ask Him to give you the liberality to realise that all He does is infinitely wise and just, and to rejoice in that wisdom and justice, since not one of us is in a state to argue with God. Even the holiest has nothing in himself; he must persevere to the end, and final perseverance is the supreme gift of God, given to all His children at His own disposal, the final boon of His liberality.

So in your spiritual life guard that great sense of security in God, but avoid all security in yourselves. Pray to God, not on account of anything you have done, but on account of His infinite mercies. Do not praise yourselves before God, do not boast of anything. Boast only of the mercies of God.

Now that absence of security in created things which is so salutary in the spiritual life is a most necessary thing in sanctity. That absence of security is also salutary in temporal things; we should not build on them, nor trust in them.

When sometimes I find myself in the house of very wealthy people, where there is no religion, I cannot help being sadly depressed by the efforts made by man to establish himself in absolute certainty. Everything seems to combine in order to safeguard life, so that no

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misery can approach and poverty has no access. Everything seems to speak of an established state. If that were really the case it would be extremely dangerous for man's soul; no man should be able to imagine that whatever happens he cannot be touched or affected. We all ought to know that at any time misfortune might assail us, at any time we might find ourselves in difficulties, and we should be ready for that emergency. Says St. Paul again: " Do not trust in the uncertainty of riches, but trust in the living God."[1] There you have certainty; in Him you may trust, yes, absolutely. Do not put your confidence in created things, in riches, in anything temporal, in man. If you do, God is sure to shake that fabric which you have erected if He wants to save you.

It is wonderful how God breaks people—breaks their powers which they have cultivated; breaks their lives, just with a view to bringing those people to Himself, to make them abandon that false security. I never despair of a man, however sinful he may be, while his sins are being constantly visited on him; if a sinful man is also an unfortunate man, I have much hope that he will be saved. But if a sinful man is honoured, well-established, if his sin is hidden,

[1] 1 Tim. vi 17.

if he is fortunate and prosperous, then I fear, indeed, for that man's salvation, lest he should be blinded by his own success. How very soon an individual of that kind will justify himself and his own doings, saying, as it were, " God cannot be angry with me since He lets me prosper thus." And he will forget the iniquities which were at the bottom of his temporal fortune and blind himself to the injustices and persuade himself that his prosperity is pleasing unto God, while all the time his whole life is an abomination to God. How eloquent are our Scriptures on this subject ! How they condemn, with a kind of divine irony, the house of a rich man, where everything is prosperous, and where there is not a single cry of distress or sadness. In contrast to this you come across those poor wrecks of humanity, sinners, if you like to call them so, who have not had any real prosperity in spite of their attempt to get it. These men are nearer unto salvation; they will find, sooner or later, that God is the only great power. There is faith very often there where you would think to find nothing but degradation.

There is nothing worse for a man than the sin of false security: that is his sure damnation.

Our Lord does not want you to have security in temporal things, I am sure of that. He wants

you to depend on Him, and if you are prosperous at one moment, that does not mean perpetual prosperity will be yours. Perhaps you have had misfortunes and you have not grumbled, or perhaps you have seen many years of poverty, and you have not blamed God for it, but have behaved with dignity. Each day may bring you fresh trial, and God may test you further because He has found you worthy. Whatever be your state, let us all learn that great Christian practice, that great Christian attitude of character, faith, throughout all the changes of life and all its vicissitudes.

We ought to be wise enough, spiritual enough to meet a variety of circumstances and temptations. You find people who seem only capable of one kind of life, and if that fails, all their existence fails with it, the bottom has fallen out of their very life; they do not know which way to turn. They had but one ideal; that gone, there is nothing more before them. But our great Christian art of life, of spiritual life, ought to teach us very differently, it ought to warn us to prepare for different vicissitudes of existence. As St. Paul puts it so clearly in the Epistle to the Philippians: " I have learned in whatsoever state I am, to be content therewith."[1]

[1] Phil. iv 11.

In whatever state I find myself, to be content. What a great lesson to learn! St. Paul says he has learned it; he has arrived at it: "I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound." He has the deep knowledge of the perfect art of life; he knows how to suffer want, for he has done it. St. Paul did not lose any of his dignity or any of his cheerfulness when he "laboured with his own hands." He knew how to live that inner life. Abundance did not turn his head, just as poverty had not embittered him; he says: "Everywhere and in all things I am instructed: both to be full and to be hungry; both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me."[1]

What a lesson to learn! This is true Christian character, true Christian behaviour, true strength. We ought to be like that, keeping our dignity in the days of poverty, holding our heads erect in the days when things go contrary, not losing heart, not lying down and asking that our souls may die. What has happened? Nothing has happened. We always have God, and can trust Him; and He will give us abundance in His own good providence, and when prosperity comes we shall be prepared for it, it will not puff us up, nor make us proud nor

[1] Phil. v 12.

hard. We find ourselves mere dispensers of that prosperity. We do not alter our lives or our view of things; we become more charitable, give more alms, do more for the glory of God. In ourselves we are the same; we are ourselves, our true selves, and our confidence is in God; that is all that matters, external circumstances are of no importance whatever. And yet for many their temporalities are their strong temptations. In a narrow sense, in a too restricted way, they think that temptation is an allurement to lust, to sexual desire. But such temptations are not the main things. The main temptations which are a danger to our souls are the temporalities. What will not men do to avoid poverty? How they are tempted in all sorts of things which warp their consciences and darken their spirits. Public calamities, too, are temptations to them. Poverty is truly a great peril to the soul. When there are catastrophes or misfortunes let us always be prepared for a great outburst of hatred towards God on the part of many people. They will blaspheme God. It is only the elect, the children of God, who are not rebellious in the days of temptation, because they alone can trace in the very misfortune the hand of God. The heathen, the unprepared man, falls a victim. We are superior

because we know that God holds all things in His hand; He has a perfect right to scourge us, and it is for our good; otherwise we might have too much self-reliance, we might even forget Him. Be always ready for temporal emergencies; they will appear in all sorts of different and unexpected ways—in fact, life is a succession of them. But we have the highest security, the security of God, and happy the man who, through all the various vicissitudes of life, can keep his mind on God; who does not succumb to any difficulty nor allow his faith to grow vague or dim, the man who sees clearly even in days of severest temptation.

XVI

SPIRITUAL RICHES

AS the last great trait of the spiritual character of the children of God let me point out to you this: it is the traditional frame of mind among Christians to believe in the riches of God, in the riches of His mercy, in the riches of His grace; to consider our life as a splendid thing, not as a burden to be borne, not as a slavery, not as a failure; we revel in light. There is what St. Paul calls the perfume of Christ which goes through and through the Christian body, and all Christian things are essentially beautiful and lovely. God's natural bent is to give; and our whole Christian dispensation is an immense gift; God presses, so to speak, His gifts on us. This means that God does not accept, He gives. Where God is concerned there is no stinting, there is no strain, because He is infinitely rich. God's gifts, says St. Paul, are without repentance, without any regret. If God gives a thing, He gives it finally, for good, and it would not be right to say that He attaches conditions to it.

If there are conditions, those are on our side. The gift implies human correspondence, of course, but that is not a condition of its bestowal. God gives with an absolute intention of our acceptance; He wants us to take the gift from Him, and, having made the best of it, to return it to Him in its perfect nature, in its unadulterated essence.

Over and over again in the sacred Gospels there are instances in which our Lord sets forth the maxim which we might truly call the maxim of Christianity. It is a very different thing from what we should naturally expect. He gives a rule which differs utterly from the rules which men apply to things. Repeatedly He uses these words: "He that hath shall receive and abound; and he that hath not even what he seemeth to have shall be taken from him." There is an instance in point at the end of the parable where one man had received one talent, another two, and another five. The man with five had made another five, and when his lord came back he found this good workman in possession of ten talents. So also the one who had received two talents had worked well and doubled his talents. But the man with one talent said: "Lord, I know that thou art a hard man; thou reapest where thou hast not sown,

and gatherest where thou hast not strewed. And being afraid I went and hid the talent in the earth. Behold here thou hast that which is thine."[1] Now this is a very churlish frame of mind, a most ungracious nature, so ungracious that the master was angry and decided to take away the talent as it would be wasted on so ungenerous a man. Accordingly he ordered the talent to be taken away and given to the man who had ten: " For to every one that hath shall be given, and he shall abound: but from him that hath not, that also which he seemeth to have shall be taken away." As if, in the things of God and of the Holy Ghost, wealth is the rule; the more you have, the more you receive. You have grace and you make use of that grace, and God never says a thing like this: " He has grace, he must not have too much, he needs no more." No, God's attitude is this: he has much grace, let him receive more. The more a man has, the more God will give him, because there is nothing that pleases God more than to enrich His creatures, and whenever He sees a man making good use of His gifts He pours more and more upon Him with a lavishness which is astonishing; as if in the school of God all the ordinary methods of

[1] St. Matt. xxv 24.

giving and taking were reversed, and there were other standards instead. And what are these divine standards? He gives to the rich; He takes away from those who have little; He is angry, not with the wealthy in the things of the spirit, but with those who are poor.

And so we are not surprised to see in the lives of the saints how these holy ones are positively immersed in graces; and the more graces they have, the more graces they receive. God has made it His rule to enrich the rich, and to give in further abundance to those who already possess the things of the Spirit.

In the things of matter the case may be different, but in the things of the Spirit this is the rule of God. Because God is rich, there are inexhaustible treasures for bestowal, and He pours them forth ungrudgingly. There goes forth from God, as St. John saw in his vision, a living stream of life flooding the whole world. Never does God regret or withdraw. Never does He say: "I made a mistake." His gifts are without repentance. He never regrets what He had given to those who perhaps in after years may fall away. God does not say then: "What waste!" No, that wonderful abundance of His liberality will come back to Him. When God has consecrated a soul, that

soul remains consecrated in so far as God is concerned. When God has consecrated a place, that place is consecrated for ever. Do not imagine that God follows the whims and caprices of men. We make a thing holy and then we profane it, but God does not do so. The Christian soul once baptised, once sealed with the seal of Christ, remains sealed for all eternity. The Christian may fall away, but God does not; that seal which He Himself has implanted remains in the soul. God is so insistent, so persevering in His gifts, that nothing in heaven or earth has power to counteract or neutralise them. The individual may retract, but God never goes back on anything He has done.

Let us think of our whole Christian life as being a thing of wonderful spiritual wealth. Let us be generous, be thankful. There is nothing so adverse to the Christian mentality as ingratitude, as unwillingness to recognise the infinite liberality of God. We are, perhaps, inclined to find fault with God's ways: we may nourish in our minds all sorts of theories about the number of the saved or of the reprobate. That is no question for us; it is a mystery, and we know not how it will be solved. The thing that is no longer a mystery, but is as sure, as shining, as clear as the noonday sun, is the

infinite liberality of God. This is the thing which is certain. Of other things we may be doubtful, as, for instance, the number of the elect or the reprobate, how God will ultimately judge the fate of those who have been rebellious to Him, except that we know theoretically that there is a place for those who are hardened to the end; but one thing we know, that God is infinitely rich, His religion is wealthy in every possible way, and He has made us rich beyond all words in grace. Our whole vocation is a vocation of wealth, not a vocation of poverty, in the things of the spirit; we are rich and are daily made richer through the great channels of divine grace which are always overflowing with the waters of life. This is the Christian, the Catholic attitude. As this spirit of the Church fades away, as people turn from the Catholic traditions, they become more and more ungenerous in their views of God, in their thoughts about the mercies of God; they have all sorts of dark and sinister ideas about God; they speak of the stern justice of Christianity, and exalt this to the first importance in their mind, when the real truth of primary rank is the mercy of God and His infinite liberality. The mysteries of spirituality of the first importance are the mysteries of God's

mercy. As St. Paul says: "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation: that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief." And he adds: "For this cause have I obtained mercy: that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all patience, for the information of them that shall believe in Him unto life everlasting."[1] He found mercy through the infinite liberality of God; he has become rich, rich beyond words, and he can never say enough about that wealth, which has become his in Jesus Christ. He urges his friends to be thankful, to thank God day and night, that so a chorus of gratitude may rise to heaven for all the things that God has done.

This great thought of God's immense wealth, of God's liberality to us, has given its name to the greatest of all our mysteries after the Incarnation itself; the mystery of the altar is essentially the mystery of the Eucharist. What is the Eucharist? Its root characteristics are gratitude and thankfulness. The daily Eucharist is offered up as a perpetual sacrifice of thankfulness. How different life would be if we could take that view of the Eucharist, giving it its full meaning—the sacrifice of gratitude! Is it not a pity we do not thus translate those words?

[1] 1 Tim. i 15.

Suppose instead of saying "Mass" we said "Gratitude." "I am going to celebrate Gratitude." What a difference it would make! That is how they talked in the early days of Christianity, taking the literal meaning of the words. And so we might say: "We are going to celebrate Real Thanksgiving, not a Harvest Thanksgiving, but a Divine Thanksgiving, gratitude to Christ Himself." How it would affect our outlook, that every morning the greatest thing we do is to celebrate a Thanksgiving service for the unspeakable gifts of God. St. Paul says: "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift."[1]

It may be said, but how does that work out in practice, in reality? Is it really true of the Christian people, of the Catholic people, that they are rich in Christ? Can we say so? First of all, remember that all that wealth of God is to a great extent hidden through its very nature. We have to take for granted the word of God. If an earthly father told his child that he was a very rich man and that he had made a banking account of half a million in his favour, the child would take it on faith, so to speak, simply believing his father's word. He would not count the sovereigns one by one; he

[1] 2 Cor. ix 15.

would accept the fact that some great power was there, some great reality, and in that trust he would be satisfied. In the same way we take the word of our heavenly Father, who tells us that there is an immense treasure laid up for us, to be used for our spiritual upkeep and progress and enjoyment in ways we cannot follow. That is enough for us; we take it on faith. God has said it; the Church repeats it. Experimentally, as a matter of observation, is it not true that the Catholic Church is wonderfully rich in spiritual things? What wealth of faith you find up and down the world among Catholics! Think of the sanctity of Catholics, of the great congregations of religious, of the priests, of the glorious army of the laity, the whole mass of Catholics, living in a constant state of grace! Think of the saints of the Church! What a wealth of spirit compared with what you see in the world! The destitution and the poverty of the world in the things of the spirit is pitiful, while there is that mighty people of God, possessing real things, believing in real things, rich in the spiritual vision of faith and the things of eternity. Is not that wealth? Both St. Peter and St. Paul were enthusiastic about the riches of God's grace, because they had passed from poverty and

servitude of spirit into the liberty of the children of God. Whenever we become fervent we are struck by the wealth of Christ, we are taught to take a share in the great work of God's wealth. Whenever you are doing certain things, practising certain things, always remember that your work is only a small fraction of a greater whole. Never fall into the fallacy of imagining that you are working out your own sanctity. All that you can do, mortifications, purity of life, devotions, are small things, the real work of sanctity is done by the Holy Ghost. We may compare our goodness, our ethical effort, to the earthen vessels which contain the heavenly perfume, the heavenly gift. We are the earthen vessels, the riches and the wealth are the gifts of God's grace to us. This is Christianity: it is an enrichment by God of the human soul, and nothing counts which is not done by God's grace. As the Council of Trent puts it: the works of the faithful can by no means please God unless they are done in God themselves. That stands to reason. Mere natural activities, even of a moral order, are nothing. The only things that count before God are supernatural things, done under the direct influence of His grace. Wealth is the order of the day, and we celebrate the sacrifice of thankfulness, thanking

God for the Redemption, thanking God for having saved the world, thanking God for the glorious army of the elect in heaven, for the innumerable souls here on earth who are saved and enter Paradise, thanking God for the mighty things of the past, for His immense grace, praising Him for the wonderful future that lies ahead of us, thanking Him unceasingly. This is Christianity; not that ungenerous, fault-finding, grumbling religion, which is so much the fashion, as if we were very badly used by God, as if He had laid heavy burdens upon us, as if we were the heroes, and as if He were doing nothing. What is, in truth, our share? Very little. And even when we do great things, we are not doing them in our own strength, but by the arm of God. This is the true spirit of Christianity. In the spiritual order there is wealth, riches, life; and we are rich in God.

Let us end with the wonderful words of St. Teresa, whose feast we are keeping, she who was so rich in Christ, whose life was so wonderful an instance of that great principle of the supernatural world—he that hath shall receive and shall abound. When she was dying she said, with deepest reality of feeling: "After all, whatever may happen, I am a child of the Church." The Catholic Church has that im-

mense wealth of God; it has the stream of life, and whatever may be the imperfections of individual Catholics, it has the Divine gifts and the stream flows full all the time. Do not be scandalised at what may seem to be wasted. God is so rich, He can afford it; He is not the poorer for anything that He gives, we might almost say, He is the richer. He is not like a man who fears to see the end of his fortune. There is no end to the fortune of God, and therefore He gives to those who already possess, and gives again and again, because He knows the more they have, the nearer they will be to Him.

XVII

SPIRITUAL TRIUMPH

" Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." —1 *St. John* iv 4.

ST. JOHN is fully aware of the power of evil that is in the world; he knows that the power of evil is a greater thing than the individual wickedness of men here and there and everywhere; he knows that the evil of the world is in a way personified, centralised, in the spirit of darkness, the Evil One. And yet he says: " Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." Do not be afraid of the world and think that you are at a disadvantage. Do not fear that the contest may become unequal. Greater is He that is for you than he that is against you. You also have power, and in the heart of each of you is the mighty Prince of Peace; the Heavenly King abides with you and He is infinitely greater than the spirit of darkness. So go back to your lives in the world with that Christian faith, expressed in the words of St. John, fully conscious of your spiritual superiority in Christ, fully confident in your

divine inheritance. You are well protected. You have the armour of God about you; you wear the breast-plate of the sacred Gospel: " Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world."

We ought always to realise that our Christian life is sheltered in a wonderful way: that our Lord is our strength, nay, our fortress. He is around us on all sides; He fights our battles; He keeps evil from us; preserves us innocent in the midst of danger, blots out from our sight and hearing much that might hurt us. This is the power of the Lord working in His beloved ones, for He is the mighty worker, fighting our battles against the powers of darkness. Never imagine that the Christian warfare is carried out by us alone, and that Christ stands aloof, watching us. No, that is not the Christian warfare. He is in the midst of it, right down on the battlefield, not remotely distant. He is the great fighter, the One who wields the mighty weapons of the Spirit, and when we fight at no time is He far from us. Sometimes spiritual symbolism has represented the great scene as if we were struggling on the battlefield, and Christ were looking on from afar; but this is not enough, it is not the full truth. The perfect symbolism is that Christ is in the

midst of the fray like the knights of old. He has the strongest armour and His followers are round about Him, and their fortune depends, not on themselves, but on Him. He said to His Apostles after the last Supper: "Have confidence. I have overcome the world."[1]

So our whole Christian life should be lived in that spirit of good cheer, of great strength, of confidence and security in Christendom. Going forward, not timidly, not hesitatingly, but with certainty and serenity. We have not to apologise; we have not to give explanations. We have to fight our fight with the absolute conviction of victory. There are no doubts about the final triumph, for "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world."

[1] St. John xvi 33.

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